

The Lowell Pearl



The Lowell Pearl

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Volume IV

Issue 2

The Lowell Pearl

The Lowell Pearl is a bi-annual publication of the UMASS-Lowell Literary Society supported by the University of Massachusetts-Lowell Bookstore Committee.

Cover artwork by Paul A. Maher, Jr.

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Submitting to *The Lowell Pearl*

*Please read carefully; your submission *will not* be considered if the guidelines are not adhered to.*

Our deadlines are
September 30th for the Fall Edition
and
February 28th for the Spring Edition

Please send two (2) copies of your submission(s); one copy with no identifying marks on it (our policy requires anonymous readings of each submission), and one copy attached to a separate cover page which lists:

- the title of your submission(s)
- your name, permanent mailing address and phone number
- a brief description of background information
- a self-addressed stamped envelope

Students who submit should give us a permanent mailing address and phone number; we may need to contact you between semesters.

Prose Writers: please submit no more than two (2) pieces of prose per deadline, as we will only accept one (1) piece of prose per author. Please-- no more than 5,000 words.

Poetry Writers: please submit no more than five (5) pieces of poetry per deadline. Please-- no more than four pages per poem; 5,000 words.

Visual Artists: please submit no more than three (3) pieces of genre on a reproducible page; preferably 8"X10" or smaller.

Lastly, we are no longer accepting submissions via electronic mail.

Send Submissions to:
The Lowell Pearl

UMASS Lowell Literary Society
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One University Ave
Lowell, MA 01854

Table of Contents

<i>Notes Taken While Proctoring the Night School Exam, by Anne Murphy.....</i>	1
<i>A Stag Party, by Vivian Shipley.....</i>	3
<i>Swans, by Marv Klassen-Landis.....</i>	5
<i>Tennessee, by Hope Amico.....</i>	6
<i>At Easter, by Betty Bernard.....</i>	9
<i>Ariana, picture by Jorge deVillasante.....</i>	11
<i>August In Rain, by Lyn Lifshin.....</i>	12
<i>They Are All Asleep, by Augustine Uzor Ogbue.....</i>	15
<i>Silk and Feathers, by Carolyn Veitenheimer.....</i>	18
<i>Deer At Window, by Joel Whitehead.....</i>	27
<i>Years Since We Curled Around Coffee In Niskayuna, by Lyn Lifshin.....</i>	29
<i>Taking The Kids to Washington, D.C., by David Starkey.....</i>	32
<i>Passage, by William Garner.....</i>	34
<i>Departure, by Alan Elysheritz.....</i>	35
<i>We Three, picture by Rich Miller.....</i>	37

<i>On Dylan Thomas' DO NOT GO GENTLE INTO THAT GOOD NIGHT, by Gabriel Monteleone Neruda... 38</i>	38
<i>Jean Marie Plouffe, by Lyn Lifshin.....</i>	41
<i>Musk, by Stacey A. Walters.....</i>	42
<i>Our hearts are restless..., by Anne Murphy.....</i>	44
<i>Dad, by Marv Klassen-Landis.....</i>	45
<i>Common Clay, by Arthur Gottlieb.....</i>	46
<i>Evolution of a Country, picture by Jorge deVillasante.....</i>	48
<i>A Secret for Pauly, by Tim Bevins.....</i>	49
<i>Wopsononock Mountain, by Lee Passarella.....</i>	60
<i>Riverboat, by David Starkey.....</i>	62
<i>Merrimack, by R.L. McGinty.....</i>	64
<i>Source, by Marianne MacCuish.....</i>	66
<i>Waterfalling , picture by Jorge deVillasante.....</i>	68
<i>Nobody Gets to Play the Same Music, by James B. Demsey.....</i>	69
<i>Tunnels, by Marv Klassen-Landis.....</i>	89
<i>Fertilities, by Stacey A. Walters.....</i>	91
<i>Flipside, by Betty Bernard.....</i>	93
<i>White Pond, by Kevin M. Carey.....</i>	95

<i>Myself, My Other</i> , picture by Rich Miller.....	97
<i>To an Obadyer</i> , by Chris Farrell.....	98
<i>Teacher</i> , picture by Rich Miller.....	99
<i>Reach Out and Touch</i> , by Mary Mackie*.....	100
<i>Snowman Coup</i> , by Chris Farrell.....	128
<i>You had the choice, Martha</i> , by Vivian Shipley.....	130
<i>Ice</i> , by David Frank.....	132
<i>Blues</i> , by Marianne MacCuish.....	134
About the Contributors.....	
Acknowledgements.....	

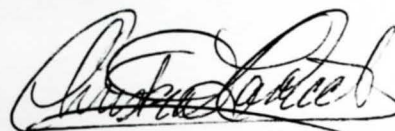
Dear Reader,

I present to you the latest issue of *The Lowell Pearl*. This issue will take you on a journey; it will offer new perspectives through the eyes of the old and the young; it will allow you to listen to people from across the nation--hear their stories; it will show you the faces of life through pictures of artwork...

This journey begins in a classroom, where we all begin, and continues with artistic expressions of emotion and style from talented writers and artists whose craft enabled this issue to be created. Each tells a story we can all relate to... I salute these people...

My wish is to invite you into a literary magazine with an order that seems natural-- an order that can make every literary grain of sand create... The Pearl...

Enjoy!



Christen L. Cavicchio
Editor-in-Chief

The Lowell Pearl

**NOTES TAKEN WHILE PROCTORING THE NIGHT
SCHOOL EXAM**

by Anne Murphy

Chairs strewn about from the day classes.

Cold. My nose is cold. Window cords hang conspicuously
from the shades. No drapes. Very institutional decor.

Noiseless gliding ball point pens,
hum of fluorescent lights,
papers rustle. Silent students
hunch forward, heads in my face.
I analyze their hairdresser's art,
see the dark roots, the curls set in circles from the crowns.
Right hands write; lefts hold up chins, cover mouths,
play with lips, twirl hair, adjust glasses.
Eyes stare at ceiling, searching for the right word.

One rides the chair like a horse;
Kareem on the side sits on his spine,
4-1/2 feet of legs crossed in front of him.
The calm ones don't hunch so much; others
look like they're ready to take off at the starter's gun.

Old room. Clock says 1:30 now; it's 8 p.m.
Boards have a whitewash of chalk. Woodwork

everywhere. Pipes painted half green, half beige.
The paint, the chairs, the students, new;
light green, Danish, wearing Nikes. The room is old.
Black at all the big old windows. Black like big mirrors.
I see myself framed in the rear one.

A STAG PARTY

by Vivian Shipley

Too much light to read. At ease,
Actaeon and his men dripped in blood
hunted hot, burning. Inlet shade, Diana
bathed with Crocale and Hephale,
arms unsheathed. Only sea was fertile,
no other fluids caressing. Odors of shellfish,
open mussels breathed like gills of the fish
whose teeth flicked, sweet as a tongue
brushing nipples. Hollowed by their heels,
holes in rock foamed as calves were pushed
apart. Receding waves sucked, melted
buttocks that skinned rhythms on sand
untracked by any man. Each lathering
the others knees, backs, navels and breasts,
slender fingers probed then spread lips
to water, wet warm as a woman's mouth.

Strands of unbound hair, sea weed wrapped
thighs. No thrust, only licking curling.
Nothing hardened until Hephale glanced
at Actaeon, stilled, above them. Diana reddened,
resentful of his pleasure cheaply gained. Having

no weapon, she let words fly: "Boast if you can
that you have seen Diana naked." This chance
but crucial junction shocked marrow in his bones.
As inner and outer self merged, horns grew.

Words froze in his throat like lard at the baying
of bitches, Harpy and Tigress who serviced
his pack of hounds. Air filled with teeth;
Actaeon moaned as the dogs panted only now
he was ripped open, pressed down, legs apart
with no escape. One bitch stripped his flank;
another tore at his head. Some thought Diana
too merciless, others praised her final

sentence: "Womanhood deserved no less."

SWANS

by Marv Klassen-Landis

The kids see a flock
of whistler swans
so Peter cuts and tears
paper, pastes the pieces
into a swan totem
with help from Talitha
in cutting out feet.

She cuts and fastens
paper plates, no beak
or eyes for her.
She creates pure design,
movement, the twist
of an edge like flight,
like her spin to a bow
when the violins lift,
then quit.

TENNESSEE

by Hope Amico

*Days ago. You sat so deeply at the bench, staring at
the keys. And I wonder what is different. It was great
outside, sparkling pewter as the thunder waited. You sat
silent. I know you heard the rain, miles away, falling onto
dry ponds. I know you head the whirr of fans moving the
humidity across our bedroom upstairs. I know you could still
hear my pulse. But what has happened to yours?*

*You stand southern and gold at my feet. Our toes
reach for each other, reach to touch the speckled dust and
drying blood wounds of walking barefoot. Yes, we met
barefoot.*

*Your shoulders rested stubborn on your torso; you did
not want to know me. Too smooth the untrusting limbs
claimed. His ice cream words will not trick us. But I had no
need to fool you. We walked together, two trees, not two
parts of one. Our eyes entwined as you pointed out a maple,
half red, half green, pressed together, a schism at its base.
"That's us," you said silently. Years later, I see we are
made of the same stuff; a division in the foundation.*

As the peach-moon crept, wounded, for someone
had taken a bite of its overripe surface, you danced to my
pulse. You swore you could hear it through my skin.

Later, when you were at a piano, I heard yours, too.
It bled from your fingertips, paused graceful above the
naked keys. You forced notes to dance upon the hardwood
floors, pulling at my feet. Hours, or days, we danced, your
vibrations rushing against me sometimes, pushing against
me, low. And you knew what it was doing.

In the same house, at last. Mingling like the
maple, we shared table and bed, food and rest, but work
was always separate. Your black baby born into our living
room. A stately addition, scratched, dull in spots. A worn
piano. You asked of it only to cry sometimes, to drip, to
grumble. You asked of it torture, death and rebirth. I never
resented that you asked less of me.

The house never seemed uncomfortable before,
despite heat, cold, humidity. The freedom has abandoned
us; we have grown into each other, stealing water and
nourishment. You sit at the worn bench, your reflection
sorrowful as you see the empty room of our belongings,
mentally divided into piles. Nothing has been removed,
yet, but your passion. The house is empty.

I am removed. I return to you what I have stolen.
You hold it, unfamiliar, a limb to be reattached. I leave, a
woodcutter, abandoning my accidental victim, in hopes it
will regenerate.

**written after hearing a song, of the same name, by Greg
Greenway*

AT EASTER

by Betty Bernard

When you hugged me goodbye like that,
your sunken body leaning into mine
for support, I almost believed
you loved me, Mother.
That from in and out of the daydream
of your life, there was a child
you acknowledged, a red parcel of limbs
you once bathed in a sink, your hair askew
as your eyes, as you lay calculating each
slice of bread, each stack of remaining quarters.

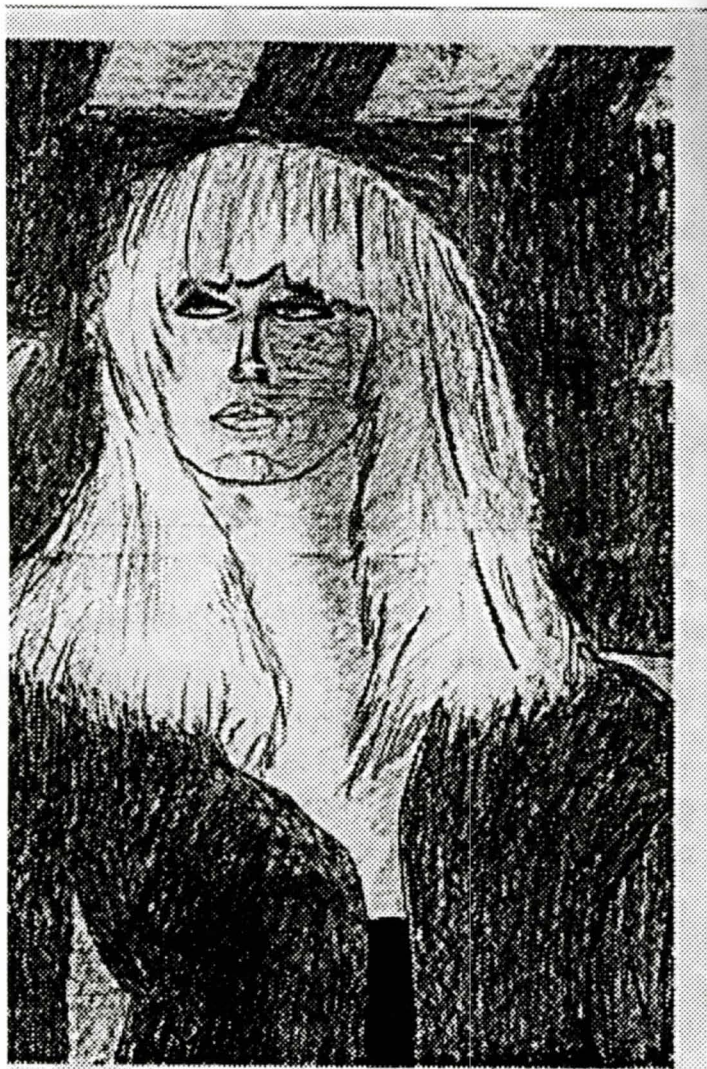
I came into focus--a chatty, giggling girl
you at times remembered was yours,
although as you searched the lines
of my face, you sometimes asked
if I was someone else.

When you were adrift so often,
I created myself--me and a family
of dolls in the living room armchair.
Wandering in my own dreamland,
you were no more than a shadow
on my horizon--sometimes a darting

pair of eyes, or a thin, browned hand
that threatened to slice me like a loaf.
More often you were only a foolish birdwoman
muttering to your flock, picking at imaginary
crumbs on your skirt.

But then, sitting in that restaurant,
my husband and children already in the car,
waiting, you lingered over egg salad, I chewed
the left over ice chips in my daughter's glass.
There you were--real--with one bottom tooth,
sharp as an egg tooth preparing to cut its way
into the shell of death. I was content to let you
linger. As the waitress scuttled around us,
clearing, we two sat--me sipping water--you
nibbling like a child over your plate.

In that hug as I left you, the hug you
initiated and not me, I felt your warmth,
substantial as a loaf of country bread.



AUGUST IN THE RAIN

by Lyn Lifshin

Corn tassles bending
on the night before my
mother and I take the
ambulance back to my
house, the last night
I will spend without
her until I will be

Holly hocks and
gladiolus seem lopped
its as if lettuce
had fallen down
for rose zinnias
to kneel on heads
lowered under the
grey. The Rose of
Sharon drips tiger
lilies and beans
at the altar of
rain the white
spike flowers
hallelujah up
from. Sunflowers

lean against wet

wood on the night
before what I know
will be my mother's
last visit I try
to soak up gladiolas,
violet, all that
grows as my mother
just grows thinner.
Jade mums stalks blur
shasta daisies,
roses, glistening
plums. Black

walnuts drip. Rain
flattens sweet peas
as blood grows in
to maples three
hours south of
where my mother
waits. Green

vines, a bracelet
around the wet
barnwood as

white bells on
sill poke up from
leaves that could
be shamrocks or
clover. I could
use a 4th leaf
spurting in the
grey before what
will be over in
a script can
only wildly
imagine starts
to start

THEY ARE ALL ASLEEP

by Augustine Uzor Ogbue

The cock crows, the goat
beckons her many offspring
and the isolated cooking shaft
is producing smoke out
on top of its roof.
It is indeed early morning
in my village, yet
the dog is still lying.
Though awake and very much
alive, she is determined
to disrupt the usual pattern
She is still lying.
Her excuse is that
the town crier has not
announced the events of the day.
She also feels perturbed
that the anticipated events
will contaminate my people.
It may defeat their spirit
and render them as vulnerable
as a new born baby.
While in her adrift mind,
the dog falls asleep all over,

she slept like the
fatigued laborer whose body
was able to capture
some rest after years,
so many years of torture.
The torture was inhuman,
nefarious and contagious.
Even my people can feel it,
but they don't know it yet.
It is believed that the
laborer is really in a slumber,
and that only he and his
beautiful wife, who died
long ago can tell it all . . .

Good morning my people,
the sun is beginning to rise.
Greetings from the Kings,
Queens and the entire Royals.
I am your honorable town crier.
Today we are all going
to join hands together to
wake up our sleeping laborer.
The Queen said that only he
can bring his wife to life.

"We have been itching the
wrong spot on our body for years,"
get your gear ready,
it's not going to be easy
waking him from a slumber.
Remember he fell asleep 400 years ago.
Somebody wake up the dog!
She can't be lying down on
a day as significant as today.
But the dog is still lying.
How are we every going to get
a loud bold barking sound to
help wake up the sleeping laborer.
With the laborer sleeping
his life away, his wife dead
and the dog still lying . . .
my people will feel it more.
They will cry out for help,
but it will be hard to diagnose
a problem because they are
misinformed. Practically unaware
because the dog is still lying.

Silk and Feathers

by Carolyn Veitenheimer

I studied the nutrition panel on the cereal box,
afraid to say anything. As Gina spooned her last few
Cheerios, I asked, "Are you sick?"

"No, why?"

"You're pale, a bit drawn." I didn't mention that
half of her head looked cold, exposed. Gina had shaved
the left side of her head, leaving a one-inch square of
braided hair. The right side still bushed out in honey-
brown waves.

"You'll get used to it, Mom." Her eyes flicked up,
defying me to react to the haircut. "I'm going without
make-up."

I fiddled with my corn flakes. "Well, they say the
skin breathes better without make-up."

"Yeah. Anyway, I'll be late today--got play
practice again."

"I'll ask your dad to hold dinner. It's his night to
cook." I concentrated on sounding normal. As she hoisted
her schoolbag to her shoulder, I spotted a jagged scab above
her ear. "Did you put some Neosporin on that cut?"

She pivoted towards me, slowly, as if under water.
Her mouth was set, insolent. Then her frown softened, and

she maked her eyes with her left hand. She blurted out, "What am I gonna do?"

I had to be sure I understood before I answered. She could be referring to another crisis, like last week's incomplete history project or the perpetual upheaval with her friend Stacy. I fixed my expression--caring, yet guarded. "About what?"

She slammed her bookbag on the kitchen table and scraped her fingernails against her raw scalp. "This--how could you say, 'About what?'"

I gleaned my fragments of wisdom from "Oprah" and "Dear Abby" and life. "Sit down. Let's sort this out." Although Rob and I usually parented in tandem, he was already at work. But I adhered to our approach: non-judgmental, accepting our child's need to make her own mistakes.

Gina splayed her fingers across her naked head and raced through her story. Her flamboyant friend Stacy, given to experiments in hair and dress, had razored a straight swath across the sides and back of her head. "At first, I like hated it, but Stacy goes, 'You think you're so original--but you wouldn't shave your head.' So I go, 'I know I'm creative. I don't have to look weird to prove it.' And she like dared me to try something strange and rattle my cage."

An objective sounding board, I disguised my fury at the manipulative Stacy. I leaned over and squinted at the scab. "We should really put something on that--it's red around the edges."

She glared at me, but the effect was comic, a savage leering under lopsided, warrior hair. Next to the skinny braid, an old scar purpled her scalp, a token of a childhood accident. Tumbling down the basement stairs, she had yowled, clung to me for comfort.

Now she snarled, "Never mind. Talking to you is like talking to the school nurse."

Unnerved by the way she banged the door, I consoled myself: just because she skinned her head, that was no reason to be nasty to me. I indulged in a long, hot shower, then tightened a towel against my skull and appraised my face. To understand Gina's risk, I challenged my own vanity, confronted the bald features in the mirror. Long face, pointy chin. Deep blue eyes, sunken, small without brown mascara and earthy eyeshadow. Shaggy brows—usually hidden behind bushy bangs—now beetled as my prominent feature.

Gina's friend was right—my self-image made me stodgy. Forty years old, a prisoner of my routine appearance. I vowed to go without make-up for a few days, but I did fluff my bangs over my eyebrows.

At the office, I bent my naked face toward my work and skipped the mid-morning break. Although no one would ask me outright about my lack of make-up, everyone would notice. I'd even fabricated an excuse: solemn, I'd mention an appointment with an eye doctor, explain that make-up would hinder the examination. People would imagine a serious eye operation and forget my pale, splotchy, fish-eyed face.

The high school guidance counselor called me at work. Annoyed—I did know my own daughter—I answered, "Gina's artistic. She's picked her own clothes since she was old enough to be aware of clothes. She's gone through phases before."

The counselor academically differentiated between phases and lifestyle statements. "She's crying for attention."

More like Gina's lawyer, I said, "It's only hair. It will grow back. She's sorry she did it—we had a scene at breakfast, but she knows it can't be undone. I don't want to call too much attention to this. After all, hair is a fairly harmless way to express herself." Smug at my watertight, even clinical, defense, I steamed up for a second attack.

But the counselor's next statement overwhelmed me: Gina had been suspended for five days for swearing at a teacher, telling him to "f--- off."

"I can't believe it. Gina must have been provoked."

The counselor explained that the teacher had commented on Gina's hair.

"Well, he shouldn't have. Don't these teachers have any training in sensitivity?"

The rest of the morning, I sorted files and listed people to contact about my marketing proposal. I stormed right through my lunch break, avoiding quizzical stares at my naked face. Halfway through my proposal's first draft, Gina's fragile weirdness at breakfast overpowered me. Her earlier phases—Little House on the Prairie, Enya, Madonna, counter-culture—all centered on clothes.

When she strutted through her Madonna phase, she had endured sexual comments that she couldn't handle—or even understand. Gina's naivete is part of her charm and part of her confusion. She sobbed over the anonymous notes stuck in her locker. She had sulked about how her girlfriend's mother criticized her appearance.

She had never altered her body before.

Her music assaulted me when I was still in the garage. She usually listened to New Age music, soft, sultry, dissonant at the worst. This was clanging, raucous headache music. Remembering my relaxation training, I gulped a few deep breaths before meeting this challenge.

From the door of her room, I noticed that she had twisted a purple scarf into a turban, hiding her mangled hair. Her own pencil sketches and pen and ink drawings

were jumbled on the floor. I shouted over the noise, careful to keep my tone even. "The music's a bit loud. Could you turn down your boom box?" I was in control—calm, reasonable. She turned it down a fraction. A jabbing pain cracked the center of my forehead.

Surrounded by paper grocery bags, she yanked clothes off hangers. "What's in the bags?" I asked.

"Old clothes and stuff—Teddy bears, Barbies, junk like that."

"You're giving away your zoo?" Just last week, she had used her allowance for another endangered species stuffed animal, a manatee. She had collected these animals since she was a toddler.

"Yeah. Some kid might like them. I'll drop them off at Goodwill."

Her swaddled head seemed bandaged, fragile. "Need some help with those?"

"No. If I can use the car, I'll like get rid of all this."

I dangled the car keys. Glancing at me for the first time, she angled her head. I resolved to dab on at least some make-up before Rob came home.

"Drive carefully."

Nothing about my sympathetic "no make-up" experiment, proof of my own cowardice. Nothing about her

suspension. No matter, we would discuss her situation rationally after dinner, Gina and her father and me.

Since Rob hadn't seen her yet, I detailed her appearance and my discussion with the counselor while he diced celery and drained oil from tuna fish. He planned dinner for 6:30 to allow enough time for her play practice. As we thumbed through news magazines, I grew uneasy: how could she be at the school play when she was suspended? Was I wrong to let her use the car? She could be running away. And she gave away her treasures—suicidal children did that.

Blurting out my qualms, I sensed Rob's uneasiness as he rubbed his ear between his thumb and forefinger. But after a moment, he reassured me. "Gina is impulsive—it goes along with her creativity—but she's level-headed and trustworthy." Our child had always amazed us—how could two comfortable corduroy people have created this silk and feathers miracle?

At 6:30 we sat down to eat. A Mendelssohn tape trilled as we silently dallied with our food, straining to hear Gina's car. When she finally got home, Rob and I continued to eat our tuna casserole that was hardening around the edges. "It's good, Gina—deli muffins, too. Join us."

She peeled off the paper wrapper and shredded half of the muffin into crumbs, squishing raisins between

finger and thumb. Rob tipped his head sideways at me, knitting his brows—my signal.

"Your counselor called today."

She pulverized the rest of the muffin.

"Do you want us to go to the school and appeal your suspension?"

She glowered at me. "No! I deserved it."

"But were your teacher's comments out of line? You have rights, you know."

"Rights, yeah. Look where they've gotten me." She was breathing heavily, on the verge of crying but holding it back.

"But if your teacher humiliated you . . ."

"Stop it! Get mad at me! I'm acting like a jerk!"

I was speechless: my Gina—strong, gutsy—now vulnerable, hostile.

Rob lashed out, "Watch how you talk to your mother. We've always avoided yelling at you. We've tried to be positive, supportive—to help you grow."

"Well, that stinks. And it's just a cop-out. You don't even care what I do."

Astonishing all of us, I yelled, "Stop acting like a brat. You're just under a lot of stress, with the play and all."

"Not any more. I've been kicked off the play. The advisor was the teacher I swore at. All he did was ask

how I'd fix my hair for the play." Sliding off the turban, she hiccuped and gulped. "I am a brat."

Seeing her butchered hair for the first time, Rob squeezed his ear, stifling his reaction. He shouted, "Right after dinner you're sitting down to write an apology letter to your teacher. You had no right to insult him."

"Tomorrow, I'm taking you to a styling salon. We'll get their suggestions, see what can be done." Her hopeful look dismayed me. After all, they couldn't glue her hair back, but I forged on, relentlessly caring. "Did you get your homework assignments?"

"Yes. They told me to stop at the main office and pick them up right after I was suspended."

"Good. Because you're going to sit right here at the kitchen table and do your work."

"You think you can control me?"

"No. But I know we can love you. We'll just have to learn a different way to show it."

She prickled, then smiled the winsome, sheepish grin of a naughty child. "I didn't give away my zoo. It's still in the car."

"Well, then, let's unload the car!" I said. Rob and Gina and I scraped our chairs back in unison, eager to focus on an activity, to stop the talk. Together we retrieved the remnants of Gina's childhood.

DEER AT THE WINDOW

by Joel Whitehead

By what brute force am I blunted
to my window at dark-thirty, between
dog-hour and wolf-hour? Brought like the
Baptist on a dove-coloured platter?

Brought dizzy-headed, dim-eyed without
spectacles, naked-souled, shy? Black
night out there. Snow shifted into Sahara
dunes. Four sooty eyes glare in at me

through the grime of night, gods'-eyes,
eternal; a dusk-dislodged trinity muzzles
against the pane (my pane!). Where is the
ghost? Two muzzles sopped with the slime

of omnipotent innocence smell the salty
stench of my untested humanity, famished
teeth guttle the ice-blistered sacrament.
Four virgin doe-eyes look in at me with

death sorrow, the blood-brined eyes of the
dangling Sufferer; there is a sadness—
even an exuberance of pain. They judge me

minus the ghost: unfit . . . unclean . . . heart

blemished. It falls terrible-tongued upon
my flaccid flanks. And upon the flesh of my
border cedars dove-grey tongues twist
and maw like clattering executioners' swords—

like arms fixed unflinching about a trembling
soot-stained throat. Then they go. Voiceless.
Noiseless. Knee deep in shifted snow dunes.
Shadows searching for the foraging ghost.

YEARS SINCE WE CURLED AROUND COFFEE IN
NISKAYUNA

by Lyn Lifshin

Your voice no longer
on my answering machine
with the breathless
whisper people took for
me, twins, someone was sure,
at least sisters.

Something slid from what
held us, as if those
cups were sucked from our
fingers, lured like the magnet
a woman who walks at lunch
hour to the ledge of the

17th floor glass
feels on her metal.
Glass slivers still
stick on my lips, reading
about you, what's happened.
Those days being look alikes

seemed funny. You shot me

near plants that died
of their own weight
with a cat whose only trace
now is pale fur caught
on the brown couch.

We nearly shared the
would-be poet who advised
us both to bring a toothbrush
to his house. Instead, we
shopped, came back with
identical boots, tilted

our heads back in the same
way, fingers in long strands
of dark hair. Our strangeness
like the smell of leaves
burning, the quote from
Nobokov you said was

our rage. We starved,
chose men who usually
didn't stay then wrote
about it before we
settled down. I could
have played the part of

mother but you had more
grey in your hair so we
wore our sisters' uniforms,
those masks we grew farther
from before I saw how
you'd slipped out, left

only a stuffed replica, the
way someone avoiding locked
doors, leaves pillows in
their shape and are gone
before it can still matter.
Even your words, your

style pulled from me tho
you'd taken what I gave you,
like any with gift someone
says, "use well." I'm jealous
you knew when to move on,
what to leave and how to

use what was given you
with grace, if nothing more

TAKING THE KIDS TO WASHINGTON, D.C.

by David Starkey

We come bearing our state's nickname
on our license plates: Empire,
Pine Tree, Land of Opportunity.

In cars littered with travel games,
frantic wives page through guidebooks
as husbands, lost, demand

silence and directions.
Beaver, Badger, Volunteer,
here, on the Mall, we nuclear

families feel at home.
The monuments confirm what we had guessed,
that photographs don't lie,

the flag's still there.
We have to laugh at the Mint guide's,
"Sorry, no free samples,"

chuckle at the White House jokes,
beneficent because we know
that our vote counts.

We paid for these rockets
in the space museum, their needles
pointing to the Plexiglas sky.

Our grandfathers wrote the history books
one afternoon when they were bored.
Sunshine, Show Me, Lone Star, Hoosier,

Hawkeye, Blue Grass, Silver, Gem.
Declaration of Independence,
Zero Milestone.

Metro, Panda, Eternal Flame.
Shut up in the backseat
or we're going home.

PASSAGE

by William Garner

He was young once,
Only dimly aware of the seasons.

Now he is in some middle state
And measures time by the moon.

If he becomes old,
The seasons will measure him.

When he is dead,
The sun will daily mark his absence.

DEPARTURE

by Alan Elyshevitz

Your intent eclipsed by a bathroom door,
you wrap solitude in a green silk scarf,
then emerge altered as in a cinematic trick
of a woman in stripes or polka dots
who spins herself solid.
Scrubbed glossy for travel,
you renounce the burdens
of an untamed cat, an unexpired lease.

I will not stir from this windowsill,
from this kitchen view of an imperiled frontier
of smoke and metal fatigue. The dogwood shivers
yet blooms through a rooftop mist.
Antennas suck the random wavelengths
from a modulating sky.

Intimations of you will remain behind:
spicy remnants on a cardboard tray,
the walls discolored and singed with your laughter,
the scuff marks on our heritage, our sad affinity.

I will not stir from this overheated room,
having slumbered so long in this compartment

of your care. Squinting now through a window
blurred with steam, I marvel at your motion.
How you scald the air with your speed.



On Dylan Thomas' DO NOT GO GENTLE INTO THAT
GOOD NIGHT

by Gabriel Monteleone Neruda

Much reference and much vigorous complaint has been unleashed concerning the use of the word gentle, in Dylan Thomas' masterful and wonderful poem, DO NOT GO GENTLE INTO THAT GOOD NIGHT, and because of the reigning confusion I considered it to be appropriate to toss my penny on the mounting heap. Some too fancifully querulous critics have whined that, like John Keats in his famous sonnet, ON FIRST LOOKING INTO CHAPMAN'S HOMER, Mr. Thomas was rather brattishly pretending to a rusticity he did not possess and was deliberately creating an illusion of error so that it might provoke volumes by learned legions of the innocent: he was pretending not to know a thing he knew quite well.

Kindly allow me to seem almost to digress.

For the hunting of birds a dog must be gentled, its naturally uncivil manners must be tamed and its bite must be softened so that the edible flesh of the bird isn't injured while the dog retrieves the shot bird from the marsh or from the field or forest lawn. Once upon a time I was acquainted with a man whose dog had been trained resourcefully and intelligently until the dog could clutch

and run with whole fresh eggs in its teeth and would break fewer than one egg in a hundred, carrying them one by one through any commonly encountered terrain.

Then these precious treasures would be placed into its master's hand and the dog would be rewarded generously with biscuits and with fondlings and with sweet words of kindness. With such a skill for carrying such delicacies the dog would never puncture the skin of a bird and would never bruise the flesh nor disturb the feathers unduly.

Although I'd be fairly unwilling to bet my penny on it, I suspect that Mr. Thomas knew as much as he cared to know about dogs and about birds and about hunting birds by the use of dogs, and I suspect that he knew zilch about such things. But Mr. Thomas knew greatly about horses involved in the racing of horses, and he cared about horse racing extremely.

While touring America during his stunningly magniloquent recitals of poetry, and while staying in the homes of his academic colleagues Mr. Thomas would, during the breakfast sessions, ignore the fawning family he imposed upon and ignore the friendly proprieties, and he would ignore the literary chatterings and the news pages of the newspapers, and he would leaf instantly and adoringly to the results nestled among the sports pages, of local and of world-class horse racing, as he drank his full quart of

whole milk and slurped his consciousness-regenerating coffee.

Doubtless this rather adolescent and barbaric behavior disappointed and irritated his dilatorily dining companions who had hoped to receive purest jewels of exquisite poeticisms from his suprahumanly lipped utterances, just as it would have irritated you and me. Hadn't he been expected to pay by entertaining?

In the training of horses a well-behaving horse may be said to be gentled when a bit may be placed into and removed from its mouth without apparent possibility of injury to the fingers and to the hands of the saddler. By the time the mouth has become gentled the feet and the flanks have become gentled, and the whole personality is gentle.

Gentling a horse is a labor of necessity and demands the expense of much energy and much time, of much focusing, and as that special moment transpires during which a horse becomes easily accustomed and becomes innocent to the handler, the horse may be said to go gentle.

Thus, Mr. Thomas was challenging his dying father not to be broken, not to be tamed by the cruel wiles of our existence, and not to be broken and not to be tamed by our essential achievement into nonexistence.

JEAN MARIE PLOUFFE

by Lyn Lifshin

Small and dark behind your mother's full skirts
as she cleaned other people's houses.

Florence and I imagined worms slither thru you
when you ate lumps of sugar in my grandmother's
bathroom, still stayed thin. Eyes like cloves

under huge lashes in classes you wouldn't say
a word in. "Canuck" the boys called out
over Otter Creek Bridge as your legs got less
spindly and the girls from college professor's
homes didn't invite you. People said your last name

with the tone they'd say tramp. Your skin creamy,
your hair curled with night. There wasn't a boy
who didn't think he could put his hand inside
your dress. You never said anything,
as if a part of you was already gone,

as if there was some place to go to. Once,
singing of Quebec, your eyes gleamed like the gold
cross boys yanked from your neck and tossed in the snow.
I heard the trailer burned down, the survivors
headed north. Jeanne Marie, if you read this
please write me

MUSK

by Stacey A. Walters

the risks were indistinguishable, that day,
and a ripe, crimson pomegranate
of sun hovered low on the horizon, waiting to explode.
on sunday afternoon he decides to go out clean,
washes his palms with saliva, knows he won't
return to dust with shrapneled ribs
getting in the way. burnt metal,
a bullet in a roasted pig.

at times like these, hunger pangs
fuse with a stench of soiled skin
and dry rot. Not the kind that rises from ash,
but the odor of swamp-wet worms so close
to the nose they nearly crawl up, believing it
their own body-dug trench. hiding, a camouflage
to blind ammunition.

it's strange that the brain is less opaque
when it knows it soon won't remember.
through the vines that hang like intestines
the smoke leaks, inside the unseen eyes swim
silent, prey on fisherman trapped in nets,
prying open empty oysters. fog,

an anonymous body bag.
and private first class stephen
smells the sweat in his helmet, says to
private first class tom it smells
like dusk in montana,
that a woman has this smell of
musk when she's feeling instinctive
enough to explode. in nam, he says,
the blood-scent invades the last
of the metaphors, the butchers are
tracking the bait.

OUR HEARTS ARE RESTLESS

by Anne Murphy

Hear my words ring out like notes
for I
a hidden lyrist
play
behind my door, upstairs
for all of you old immigrants across the street
so still on separate porches.

This hussy summer moon's too loud
never lets a fellow sleep—

Ah, you've been patient,
staring at
this town's dumb show
some hint of speeding car . . . or horse, or chariot—

Come:
tonight, at least
hear my lays:
I'll sing in native tongue!
just till our aching eyes can close.

DAD

by Marv Klassen-Landis

A great stone god, you sit
and stare like a marble Lincoln.
I clamber up a cold leg, slide back.
All I want is your lap, to be held,
a moment of warmth.

No, goddamn it, I want to wrestle in the desert,
like Jacob with his god. Bruised and bloody,
I'll pin your shoulders to the sand, demand
a blessing.

Like Casey Jones, you drove toward death.
I wanted to call out to you, way up there in the cab.
But the engine was gathering steam, your jaw
was set and your eyes were on the rails.
I could not speak.

If I could, I'd pull you back from beyond
the river, force your return.
But what would I do, what would I say?

COMMON CLAY

by Arthur Gottlieb

Buzzsawed by swastikas
we were stacked in kilns
like cords of wood.

Sparks flew from our burning
hair as we inhaled heat
like hate and breathed curses.

Our ash boiled over
death camp smokestacks
like thunderheads no wind
could disperse, like black
sheep shepherds could never herd.

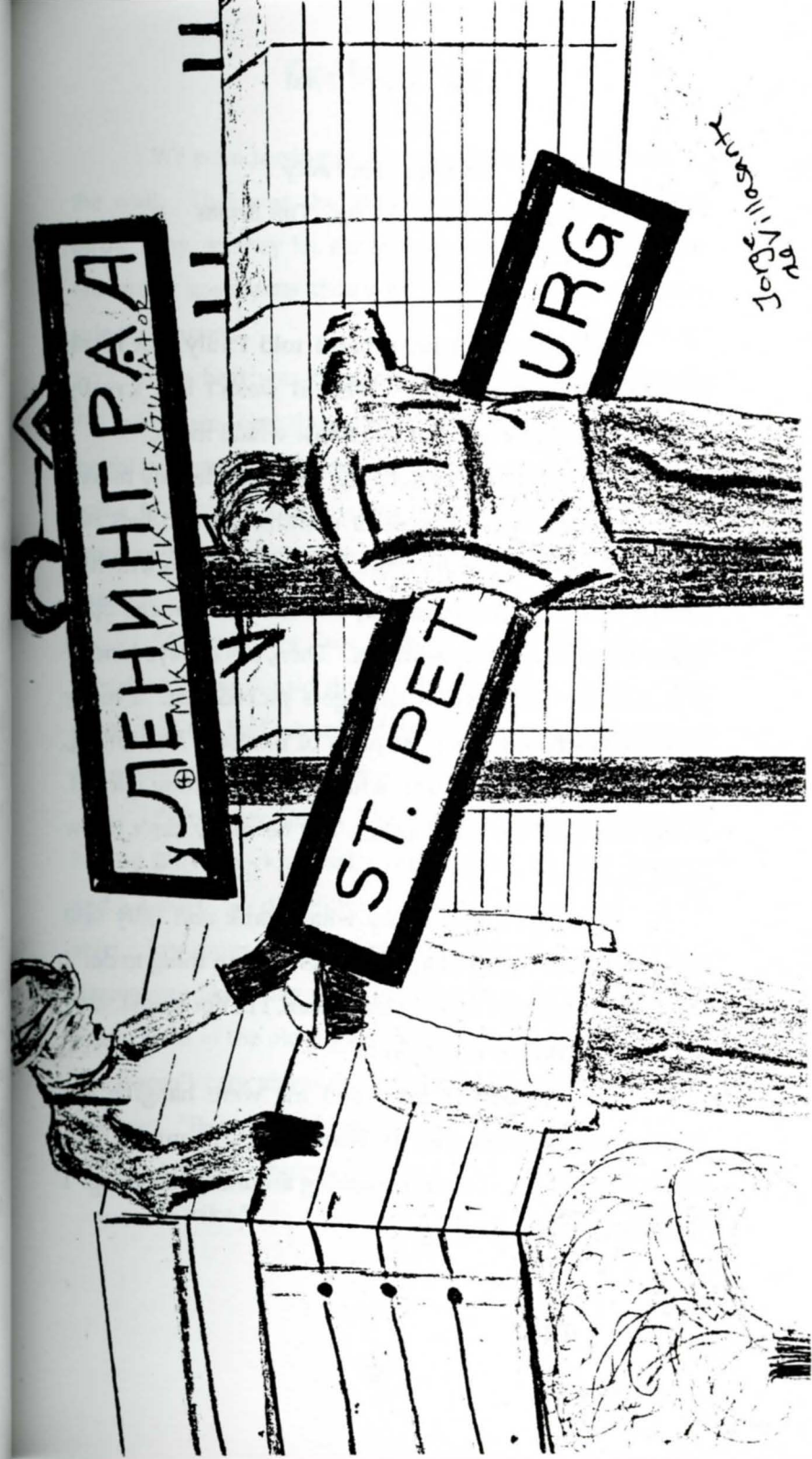
Now as acid rain we deface
their resurrected cities
stain the glass of their chapel
windows and settle like soot
on the shoulders of sinners
bent by shame.

We cling to the clothes
of civilians who claim innocence.

But no soap made from melted
human flesh, however perfumed,
could cleanse the stench
of burnt bodies broken
on the world's wheel.

Our urns are made of clay
from potters' fields.
Gold and silver wrenched
from teeth fuse the glazes.

No lips left to shape a prayer.
Yet bone and shard in common
graves share a star constructed
of two eternal triangles
crossed on a sky blue flag
these desperate dead decorate
forever.



A Secret for Pauly

by Tim Bevins

The sky didn't fall when I told Pauly that Frank and Billy didn't like him. Well, it wasn't like I really expected the sky to fall, but you know what I mean.

I hardly know him, Pauly, I mean. He only moved into the apartments a couple of months ago and he's two years older than me and I don't have much to do with him except when all the guys play baseball out in the open space behind all the apartments. Then, it's always kind of a him-or-me thing about who gets picked last. I really stink at baseball, I mean, at parts of baseball, like hitting, which is really important when you're getting picked. Pauly can't hit too good either, but he really can't throw good, and I can.

Anyway, I told Pauly what Frank and Billy said about him and I kind of knew it was a mean thing to do. I mean, now I guess I know it was mean, I'm not stupid. But, shoot, I don't know why I did it.

See, Frank and Billy and me were hanging out playing off-the-wall ball at Frank's apartment. That's how I heard them. I wasn't sneaking around or anything. I was there, really playing.

We were tossing at a square Billy drew in chalk on the wall. That was the strike zone. Like I said, I can throw okay, so they let me toss against them. One strike, one out, it goes faster that way. Hits for all the stuff outside the square.

The heat was blasting us. The grass was mostly dirt where we were throwing from since it hasn't rained a lot this summer, and now it's August and probably isn't going to. It was kind of like playing in a desert, except there were big trees here and there, so there was some shade.

"Pauly says his father works for the Vice President." Frank said this to Billy between pitches. Billy threw and the ball whumped against the last brick right in the upper right-hand corner of the square. "Strike," I said.

"We know, Peter. We know." Frank was standing behind Billy, checking balls and strikes. He had jeans on and a t-shirt. So did Billy. I was wearing shorts and a t-shirt. My mom says shorts are lots cooler when it's 90 degrees out like today was. I don't ever want to wear shorts 'cause none of the older guys does, but my mom makes me. She doesn't care about what it looks like. "Be practical," she says. "Be a dork," I say.

Another whump.

"Strike."

"Cool it, Newman. We can call our own balls and strikes." Frank didn't like me much.

Whump.

"It never hurts to ask." I kind of mumbled this, but he heard me.

"I might if you ask again, Newman." Frank really didn't like me much at all.

"Third out, Frank. Your turn." Billy tossed the ball up high, way over the maple tree top, and Frank caught it in the sun. I mean, the sun hit him right in the eyes, but he caught it.

"Nice one, Frank." That, I figured, would make him forget.

"Six-five-one, Frank. You're winning. Sixth inning." Billy walked back to where Frank was standing when he was throwing. He was kind of ticked off about losing to Frank.

Frank went into a pitcher's stance and went into a pitcher's motion, high leg kick and push off from the back leg.

Whump, dead center.

"One out," Billy said. "How do you know his old man doesn't?"

"Doesn't what?" said Frank.

"Doesn't work for the Vice President."

Whump. Two outs. The ball took a crazy stone bounce on the way back and Frank moved sideways to snag it easy.

"Well, for one thing, his father's a dork and no dorks work for the vice president of America," said Frank.

Billy, who was pretty smart, said, "How do you know who works for who? Dorks can work anywhere. They do at lots of places. Look at Mr. Hawkins." Mr. Hawkins was the science teacher and he was a dork. He laughed at science jokes that no one else even got.

"I just know. Besides, he lies about everything else, so why isn't he lying about that?" Frank actually made some sense with that one.

Whump. Three outs. Frank flipped the ball over his head and walked away. I caught it on one bounce.

Pauly did tell a bunch of stories that were hard to believe, like the one about starting a baseball team when he was living in Germany, and other ones, too. It was like he had something to say to everyone about everything they talked about, but different enough that it would seem like it was a better thing. At least, that's what happened when I was around, like during baseball games. He stunk almost as bad as I did. At least I could throw pretty good. He could throw, I mean, he didn't throw like my sister or anything, but he could never throw strikes like in this

game, and I could throw a pretty lot on a good day. Even I didn't believe him about the baseball team in Germany.

"Okay, so maybe that's a lie. I didn't say I believed him. I just asked how come you think that."

Whump. Single. Not a great start.

"Man on first," Frank said. "The guy's a jerk."

Billy turned to Frank then and said, "You just think that 'cause he made you look bad in science lab when Hawkins asked how your experiment was going. Pauly got you there, didn't he?"

"No, that's a lie." Frank was turning sort of light red, like Billy got him. "I just hadn't finished, and Pauly was acting so cool helping Mary Rose with her experiment 'cause he finished his. He didn't have to say, 'Frank couldn't find a frog under a microscope.' I should have punched him."

Mary Rose was sort of Frank's girlfriend. She lived in the next court over and sometimes when she came over here to hang out Frank kind of hung around her and she kind of hung around him a lot.

Whump. Strike. One out, man on first. Maybe I'd get out of this with no runs. Low score wins in off-the-wall ball.

"Billy, you like the guy, huh? You're probably queer for him." Frank was really red now.

Billy turned and threw a tennis ball (he had the extras) hard at Frank. "Eat it, Frank. I hate Pauly." Frank skipped away and the ball ran all the way to old lady Harris' yard area. Frank laughed. He wasn't watching or Billy either when I hit the strike zone for another out. Two down.

"Me, too. I just wanted to hear you say it."

"He thinks you guys like him." I said this. My next pitch was a hit, men on first and second. Pauly told me the other night that he thinks they like him. He said, "I like those guys and they like me." I think he wanted me to say something like, "Yeah, they do." I can't tell you why I thought that, it just seemed like it, I mean, I can't read minds or anything, but it was one of those things you can tell, you know? But I didn't say anything then, even though I kind of knew he was wrong.

"What? Did you tell him that, Newman?" Billy said.

"No, uh-uh. I never said that. He just told me that he liked you guys and that you guys liked him."

"How come? What is he, queer?" Frank was on this queer thing. I don't know why, or even really what a queer is, but he does and I'm not gonna ask him. I know what he'd do, he'd tell everyone I didn't know.

"Geez, I don't know, Frank."

"It's your turn to throw, Peter. Men on first and second. Come on, throw." I don't know how he figured out I had two guys on the bases.

Whump. "Three outs," I said. "Your turn, Frank." I tossed the ball over my head. It bounced before Frank saw it. He caught it without even looking at it.

"Well, I hate his guts." Frank really was mad now.

We kept playing for a while after that, but they stopped talking about Pauly.

I didn't stop thinking about what they said because of what Pauly said the other night. He must really want these guys to like him to say that they did when he maybe really didn't know. Now I knew the truth. It was so simple, I could just tell him now, 'cause I really knew.

We were hanging out after dinner. It was not dark yet, like 8:00 or something. We were picking crabapples off the big tree on the island that was in the center of the court and we were tossing them down the sewer in the curb on the other side. I was much better at this than him. There wasn't anyone else in the court out, so Pauly was just kind of hanging around with me till he saw someone else, I guess. The stuff Billy and Frank said just sort of floated into my mind when I was sitting with Pauly.

"You want to know what Billy and Frank said today?" I just jumped right into it. I didn't think too much, just spit it out.

"What about?" Pauly said.

"About you."

"What?" Pauly didn't look at me and didn't seem all that curious.

This is when I got nervous, but it was the kind of nervous like I had a secret and secrets only get sort of exciting when you are about to tell them. I mean, everyone says, "Can you keep a secret?" and most people say, "Sure," but no one does and even when you hear them ask you, it's only exciting because you know you're not going to, you know what I mean?

"They both said they hated you."

Pauly was not ready for this secret. I figured this out quick after I told him. Okay, I wanted to let it out, but the words sounded worse out loud just between me and him there on the island in the middle of the court than they ever did when Frank and Billy said them. I felt my stomach sort of shiver or something when I heard them. That's when I thought maybe this is a mistake. I think now that maybe it was 'cause Pauly got weird afterwards.

I didn't want to look at Pauly, but I did. It was that secret kind of feeling again. I looked at him sort of the same way I looked at a cut on my skin, like I wanted to see it but was afraid to, like, what would I do if it was deeper and bloodier than I could stand?

Pauly stopped throwing right away. He sat down on the island curb and sort of flipped his last crabapple into the street. He laid his arms on his knees and looked straight ahead. I sat down next to him. I looked away, then I leaned back on my hands so I could look over his shoulder at him. He looked down at his feet and they were moving, jiggling up and down like he was taking a test in school and didn't know the answer. Because his arms were on his knees, his whole body shook, too.

"They really say that?"

Then he said, "You sure?"

Then he started again, before I could even answer him.

"How do you know? Were you there, or did someone else tell you?"

Pauly never looked at me when he asked those questions and he asked them one at a time.

I never know what to do when some kid's about to cry. This time, it was just me and the other kid, not lots of kids like on a playground. He stayed looking at the ground, but then he looked up. I tried not to stare at his face 'cause I thought it would be like staring at a dying bird or something, you know, like something in pain that wasn't dead but was going to die and you knew it and didn't want to watch the end.

"Yeah, I was there. Why?"

The "why" seemed dumb when I said that.

Pauly was crying. I could see the wet on his face. On his left cheek, the one I could see, a tear ran down to his mouth, right along the edge. I shivered again. Pauly jiggled his feet up and down again. I looked at my feet and they were rocking back and forth, in and out, by themselves.

"I just wanted to know, that's all," Pauly said.

I twisted a stem of a crabapple in my fingers and watched the apple do a circle 'cause the stem wasn't straight. My neck felt hot then. You know how it gets when a teacher calls on you when you know you were talking and you know she wants to know if you know what she was talking about and you know you don't? That's the hot that was on my neck.

Pauly wiped his cheek with the pointing finger of his right hand, but almost like he was trying to hide it.

"I gotta go in. I'll see you tomorrow."

I wasn't glad about this. It didn't seem right that he was going to go home by himself, but he didn't ask me to come.

"Sorry."

I said that as Pauly was walking away. He didn't say anything back. I was sorry, too, am sorry, but I didn't know it till I said it, just like I didn't know I was going to say it to him really right up until I said it, you know? I

mean, you probably know what I mean. It just came out, right by itself. "Sorry" just hung there alone though, 'cause Pauly never answered.

WOPSONONOCK MOUNTAIN

by Lee Passarella

Years ago the lost boy
was found there,
a bleached razor
remnant, a fanion of bone
just glimpsed among the thick-
with-ruse-and-dust laminar
that coats the slope. What
he sensed or suffered before
they found him, I hadn't read;
even journalism draws
a line between the known
and guessed.

Any February,
the place seems
capable of murder
or of poetry: the top
congealed in off-
whitecaps, the underparts
sunken, airless. At the base
the city's flotsam bobs up
in a trough between the peaks
where the sun scavenges,
considering a tin-

gold roof, the bezel
of a windowpane, before
it turns a cyclops' eye
toward the slope that's dressed
in fleeing harlequin:
the fierce gray panicles
of ashes, oaks, and tulip-
trees swimming across
the surface, then drowned
in shade.

Like the flocced
sea a mile from shore,
a place as gorgeous,
terrible, unreclaimed
as any in the mind.

RIVERBOAT

by David Starkey

Something had gone wrong on our cruise. The rudder was stuck so that we made perfect circles in the Mississippi. The Divorced Ladies Club of Orange, Texas, complained bitterly on the air-conditioned lower deck. Fingers fidgeting with queen-size Virginia Slims, painted nails click-click-clicking against plastic cocktail cups, they launched into stories of their ex-old men which foundered mid-stream of consciousness and drifted into the past history where memories are stowed.

On the middle deck Professors for a Smarter World mingled with the Stonewall Jackson High School cheerleading squad. It was an old boys club—briars and tweed. They read the cartoons in Marx for Beginners to the sequined young ladies on their laps. "Ha ha, wage labor! Ha ha, the history of estrangement!" A cool river wind arose, caressing the professors' long white locks as they marched from bow to stern learning to twirl batons.

Up top I discussed the fate of humankind with the richest man in Baton Rouge, and the poorest. It was a real pow-wow for the ages. The richest man pointed to barges

tied up along shore: chemical, coal, scrap iron and crushed gravel. "I own them all," he lamented. "Nevertheless, I'm not happy." He gave a ton of ragged tires to the poorest man (who gladly accepted): "All yours. If we ever stop spinning."

But, to date, we have not. Aboard the Samuel Clemens many sultry days have passed into so many humid nights, nights lit only by the elfin twinkle of refineries. The tales we recite are taller every time. And our conscientious guide continues to point out the same few sights: "Here is the port. Here is the skyline. Over there are your once new cars, rusted beyond recognition."

MERRIMACK

by R.L. McGinty

Right on the edge
of the river
march the rows
of broken windows.

Three stories of
red brick stretch
on to the bend,
1/2 a mile

Cold empty smoke
stack, ugly, impotent
steeple whispering.

All this; a recent
border for the
ancient rolling
exodus.

Wide Water.

Merrimack River.

Rolling out the
bottom arc of
the cycle in
a quivering guttural
bass.

Upriver; Lowell's Kerouacian

mills, brothers to
these Lawrence
walls. And down
stream; my
Haverhill-town.
Ho there! Comorant,
my river-sister,
is this our tears?

SOURCE

by *Marianne MacCuish*

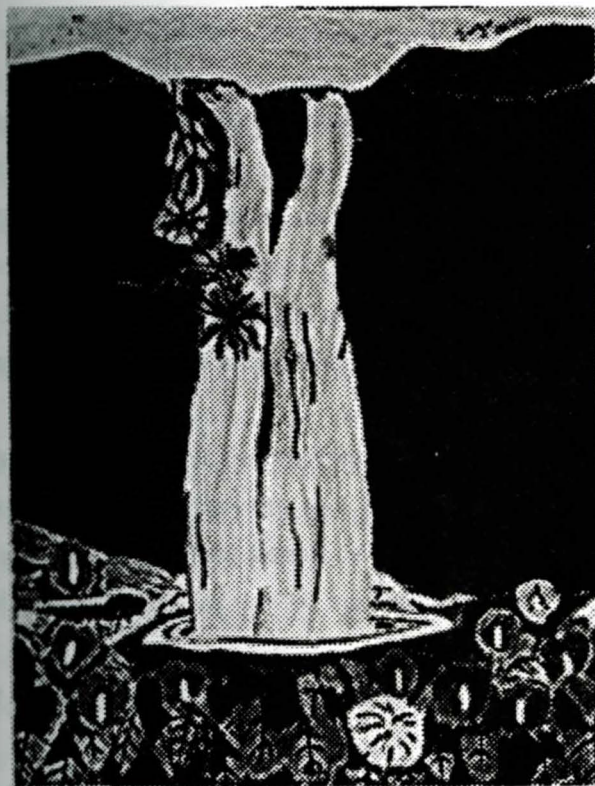
A place needs shoes
fallen beside couches,
the old cat's
torn quilt - books splayed open
floored
a lost first draft

Not this tidy poet's
room of plants and lamps,
the high-polished desk where
silver-framed half-optinists
shine...hiding pain
on birthday occasions

A room that loosens its belt,
ungirdled
indulging freedom
as bel canto soars
over the ordered arpeggio
threading the image
flying to the source

As the musician's passionate search

leads to the piano strings'
musty lair - or the writer,
to the huge enclosed box of
the brain, unsealing the light-
struck centuries, embracing
memory
sustaining in air
those minor chords
leached from dreams



Nobody Gets to Play the Same Music

by James B. Demsey

Why wasn't it dark? Everybody else can get up without having the sun blasting their eyeballs out of their head. "Shoulda put down the shades before goin' to bed," a groggy reminder to himself. Damn! The sun is just too much, too much sun, too much snow. Why can't snow be black anyway? It wouldn't be so hard to look at. It was almost three PM.

"Sure hope the bathroom is where I left it," mental joke to himself and it was answered by a comparable, wordless chuckle as he lumbered stiffly, lurching across the floor to the bathroom, not feeling much of anything from the nose down.

With dubious inspiration, he flashed a quick look at the mirror to see if he was looking at himself.

"Well, was I?" he asked the image in the mirror. "Yeuschgk," or something like that, said the face in the mirror, its eyes sweeping over his unkempt, sleepy, dishevelment. "Yeah, 'yeuschgk' is not the half of it," he retorted to the guy in the mirror, grabbing the electric razor. Buzz, buzz, buzzzz, buzz, the razor droned on like a diamondback with its rattles whirring in overdrive. Done. He ripped the snake out of the wall.

It was now quiet. The windowless bathroom was a relief from the glare that was sneaking around the corner from the bedroom. Maybe he could just close the door and stay there. "No, no, can't do that. Your audience calls, fans await, music is to be made, the pi-ano played. Onward!" the mirror mocked insistently, grimacing a weak, not-quite-half smile.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah," he telepathed back. "I gotta go to work. I gotta go out into the cold, get the bus and go to the club. OK! OK! STOP pushing! I'll get going!"

The bus stop was two blocks away. Wasn't winter outside just wonderful! Three thirty in the afternoon, the buses are all running late. Too much sun, too much snow. Too much wind. Too Much Cold!!! "Gotta keep the hands warm" his mental image from the mirror coached. "Great idea," he agreed, orchestrating a frenzy of finger flexing, some pocket piano pizzicato practice. The vigorous rippling of fingers in the gloves in the pockets in the overcoat didn't help much.

Was he really the only one at the bus stop who was cold? There they all were, most of the regulars, a couple of the sometimers and a rapturous, hugging, snuggling, and probably overheated couple who were not even remotely aware that it just might be winter.

Ah, the familiar faces, Mrs. Redcoat, Fanny Fancy Furhat, Billy Blackleatherjacket and Gary

Grayleathercoat, Mrs. Motherly Matron and Darling Dancing Daughter who are off to aerobics and ballet classes respectively; today must be Wednesday. Maggie the muscular maid with her red fish net shopping bags full of goodies for her penthouse patrons and a young man carrying his school books, protected in slick covers printed with the city college logo. The four or five clutches of kids were waiting to go to wherever they go every day. Along the periphery were the single, individual teenagers. The 'loaners' standing aloof; isolated and silent in the snow, like solitary fence posts set apart in the ground without a single, visible tie to anything around them. Then there was a well dressed Old Man. "Never seen him before," a thought that would never make *Variety*, page one. At least three-quarters of the people waiting for the bus usually were in the never-seen-em-before-and-never-see-em-again category.

The wind shredded the white puffs of his breath before he could see them. He wanted to put on his blue-blockers but they got so cold on his face so quickly. The sun's glare was hard, the wind's whip was hard, the standing was hard and the waiting was hard. Most of the crowd looked hard, frozen.

The Old Man looked not hard but tough, standing straight, his back to the wind, an unflinching sentry in an

expensive, flawless wool suit and overcoat with matching boots, hat, gloves and scarf, all a perfect blue-black.

"Need a hot cup of coffee?" the voice from the mirror probed. "Uhhh boy, yeah!" he mumbled back, lips zipped closed over chattering teeth.

He shook himself visibly. The old man glanced at him. Ummm, why not, he thought, "Wanna get a cup of coffee and warm up a little?" he asked the senior citizen sentry figure. The spindle of blue-black perfection didn't budge. He moved closer and said, "I'm going to get some coffee. Want to get some coffee, too? Maybe just go inside to warm up a little?"

"Thank you no, young man. Thank you very much anyway, but no thank you." No smile, no frown, either. The Old Man's tone and bearing accentuated every word he said. It was a thorough, direct answer, indeed. No beating about the bush there, whatsoever!

The old man looked away, absently toward the street, just as if there had been no query put to him at all. Then, for an old duck, he moved briskly away, a few good steps and stopped, letting three of the bystanders become his wind break.

Burrrrr. Not a bus in sight anywhere. Well, good enough, coffee time anyway!

The donut and the first cup of coffee disappeared quickly. His fingers weren't cold any longer. Steamily,

through the glass front of the coffee shop, he saw the 403 crosstown bus arrive and begin to load up. The 403 was late. It was 3:42. His 612 bus, then, should be right along, in five or six minutes. He took his second foam cup of coffee and nested it in the first one for insulation and went back to the door nearest the bus kiosk just as the 403 hissed its door closed and waited to roll away into a passing hole in the traffic. The winder wind came through the doorway in blocks of prepackaged pure cold every time the door swung open. The sounds that came with it were just as crisp and harsh.

"Hey you people by the door, yeah, allahya, please doan crowd up the door area." An admonishment from the proprietor, "—and NO hangin' around during busy time, *please!* I know it's cold out there but other people want to come in for coffee too. Thank you. And have a good day, we do like you."

"O.K., I gotta leave sometime," he thought, but it was not a very good justification for going out into all *that*. He stepped out and stood with his back firmly against the building. What a sight, he looked out across the foam cups and took a sip. The sidewalk was gray and icy; thick curdled, slush and slop ran along the curb and gutter. That makes for poor traction, even for big buses, no wonder things were late. The 403's engine surged with a black belch that the wind combed into a long, thin carbon streamer.

Another joke for himself, or really a riddle, "When in life should it be your goal ignore the donut and to watch the hole?" The answer, "When you are a bus driver trying to get back into traffic." The diesel engine spurted each time one of those elusive holes sped by. The bus's double set of rear wheels slipped, humming, whirring, vibrating like a kazoo doing ragtime. The driver tapped a metered cadence on the accelerator pedal to rock the bus forward into traffic. A diesel driven metrobus metronome? Forward a bit, slide back a little, fun forward some more, slide back and fun again, lurching, trying to escape into traffic. Vrooom, vrooom, vrooom.

The bus was loud, the wind was loud, the unmelodious background of jumbled traffic noise was loud. But that loud was nothing!

In a mix of major and minor keys, Mrs. Matron and Ms. Furhat, together, with synchronism and simultaneity, but in absolute disharmony, screamed something incomprehensible that scaled up above it like a coarse rasp chewing through the hard, snow-charged wind. Jolted, galvanized, alerted, the young man near the front of the bus darted off the curb into the slurry of the street, an arms length in front of the bus, and waved his hands and books frantically in the face of the 403's driver.

The driver wanted to be angry as a big, long hole slowly slipped by. "What the heck is the kid doing? I'm

behind schedule already." The young man was shouting something and pointing back toward the screaming women. The driver had heard nothing from outside and waved the young man back to the curb. The bus surged again. The women shrieked again. The young man gave no ground. One curb-side fence posts jumped to the bus and banged on the forward door with his gloved fists as he, too, bellowed at the driver. The rest of the people waiting around for the 612 were suddenly animated by a communal revelation, a common insight that hit like lightning.

The bus engine abruptly relaxed back to idle but then the women screeched even louder.

The driver got out. The young man, still shouting and gesturing toward the rear of the bus, grabbed him. "Look, look, look. LOOK," the young man cried to the driver. The crowd pulled in tighter around the rear of the bus.

He sipped his coffee, his back still glued to the building. He could see nothing of what the commotion was about but he could see the driver step down into the snow. A pained look snapped across the driver's face, as if the driver had put his bare feet down on a hot stove. The driver bolted through the glut of winter's gutter gruel, through the crowd crammed around the back of the bus and through the line of sight that might have given a view of what was going on. The driver did something to the bus,

had some animated conversation with the crowd, pointed down the block and turned towards the front of the bus as some one from the crowd dashed down the block, gingerly skating in the direction pointed.

The crowd at the rear of the bus gave way just a little and just for a moment as the driver headed back to his seat. The bus engine pulsed power in a short, delicate spurt. The bus rocked gently forward and then back just one time. A relay of voices along the curb connected the driver to the people outside at the rear of the bus. The hubbub went back and forth, even the hand motions and tone of voice were replicated with fidelity. More back and forth communication, more gentle engine pulsing, more cries from the crowd. The people in the bus jammed against the fogged windows in the back and peered out, making damp rose prints on the frosted glass.

The coffee in his stack of cups was getting cold. "Where in blazes was his 612 bus?" he asked himself, studiously ignoring the delay of the 403. He was glad it wasn't his bus that was having problems. "Where is it, where's my bus? Gotta get out of this wind! Gotta get to work."

The skirmishing at the rear of the bus subsided. The 403's problem was solved. Or was it? BANG. A man, more an apparition, burst through the circle of curb gawkers. His appearance, not ten minutes ago, had been

impeccable. Now he was totally soaked, dirty as only one can get by rolling in a city gutter and he looked angry. His face was cut; dark smudges were on his forehead and cheeks. Bruises? His hands and his shirt were stained black and red. Blood? His tie, shredded, its white insides hung out like the viscera of a dead bird. He had blood in his eye, both figuratively and factually. He moved with power, a grubby tackle determined to sack and opposing quarterback. "Stop. Stop the bus. Stop everything! Stop! Stop! STOP!!!" he shouted as he lunged toward the front of the bus and got eye level with the driver in a single motion. "We're gonna kill that poor bastard at this rate," the man's voice was loud but without anger or any other kind of emotion. "Shut off the engine!" he demanded, stripping off what used to be his tie, stuffing the remnant in his coat pocket.

"I can't do that," said the driver with authority. "It's a diesel and it should run all the time, especially in the winter."

"O.K., dammit. You sit there and do not move this bus one inch until we get an ambulance, the cops and a ten ton wrecker. I'll be right back!" He was still fumbling with his tie as he jumped from the bus and charged into the nearest store.

The last of his second cup of coffee went down with a gulp. Mrs. Redcoat tore herself away from the back edge

crowd and looked at him as he stood there, his back still tight against the building, the nest of empty coffee cups in his right hand. They had seen each other here often but they had never spoken. With a small white hanky, she blotted drops of freezing water off her face. Hesitating, nonplussed, she whispered, "Hello, excuse me, but you were in the coffee shop. Can you tell me if the restrooms in there are clean?"

What a question, but after all she wasn't quite a total stranger. "I've never been in the ladies' room," he stated flatly. "The men's room is alright usually," he nearly concluded, but curiosity was chewing on him some, pushing his question out. "What's going on over there?"

She tensed and became rigid, her face went blank. Her eyelids slammed closed and her face wrinkled up. Plainly the drops on her face had been tears. "My Lord! My Lord!" she cried, "that poor soul, that poor, poor soul. He... well...that poor man slid off the curb and fell down between the two rear wheels of the bus and is wedged in there by the snow and ice." She puckered her lips and nearly started to weep again. "Then they tried to dig him out and... the bus just kept coming down as they dug out the snow. Then they tried to move the bus a little. The wheels slid and spun, those huge pair of wheels just spun the poor man—like a log in the water, around and around—until the wheels stopped moving. He has broken bones, oh, I'm sure

of that, I know that, well, probably, uuhh..." She fell silent, nibbled on her lower lip slowly and then blurted, "And his left arm went under the back wheel. Oh God, what a sight and no one can do anything!" She shivered all over, a convulsion intended to shake off what she had seen. It didn't work.

She dropped her chin into her scarf and coat collar. The "Oh! Oh!! OH!!!" that came out was more like grunting than speech. She lifted her face up. "I'm sorry, excuse me for troubling you. I have to get away, get in somewhere, dry my face. I must go! Maybe you can help him." She took a deep breath, dabbed a wet drop off the end of her nose, turned sharply and disappeared into the coffee shop. The 403 crowd continued to churn. Had she actually said that he or anyone else, there right now, could help some guy trapped under the bus? That guy needs a doctor or an undertaker, not a musician, unless they want *Taps*.

"You're going to be late," his inner advisor interrupted. He looked down at his watch, it was only 3:46. All of that chaos in only a couple of minutes, three or four maybe. "Don't time fly when the fickle finger spins the hands?" he rhetorically responded.

The man who had gone down the block only minutes before was sprinting back, precariously over the slick, a policeman at his side. Maybe the cops could do something.

There were flashing lights, distant, approaching from opposite directions. The wind blew away any evidence of their sirens and horns. The lights got bigger, became more numerous but the anticipated blare of assertive audible accompaniment was not detectable.

The street slowly shrank into a single, one-way lane lined with lengths of double-parked traffic. A couple of blocks down, the traffic was still being herded out of the way, it struggled to yield to the oncoming emergency vehicles and police cars. Ah ha, there was a bus! It signaled to get over, to clear the way. Was it the 612? No... yes it was. Good! It would be a relief to get out of here and get going, but where would he catch the 612 now?

The cops were directing the crowd to get back from the 403. How soon would his bus get here now, he wondered? The traffic would become snarled totally, blocking everything including buses. The only vehicles that were moving had flashing lights.

The wind died silently; the flashing lights did have voices. The whine and warble of the sirens spilled into the windless void. The bleat and blast of the air horns knocked the snow out of the air.

The crowd thinned out some. The bus driver, the cop and the guy with the shredded tie were down on their hands and knees by those rear wheels. He stared at the three, actually at their backs. It looked as if they were

praying together except the driver kept waving his hands and looking around.

The cop stood up. Those rear wheels were huge and the figure trapped between them was so small. Only the top of an ash blond head resting on the driver's brown jacket was visible.

He pushed tighter against the building. "Mrs. Redcoat was right on one point though, it was a bad sight," but it got worse as he saw the small figure more clearly. It was clad in perfect blue-black. That poor guy was the Old Man. It was the Old Man who was jammed in there. Had the Old Man slipped because of the bad footing? Had some one bumped him? What if the Old Man had not been at the curb? If the Old Man had just come in for some coffee? If the Old Man had just been left alone? If he had just left the Old Man alone? *That* question was *electric*. It was not a question that he wanted to think about, much less examine closely. Really, that was, a very bad question, truly a very, very bad one. But why should he feel guilty, as he did. The thought chilled more cruelly than the cold.

The foam cups were still in his hand as he was flooded with these thoughts of his involvement. What 'involvement?' He threw the cups away in the snow, just as he wanted to throw his thoughts away.

Abruptly, he heard the cops and the medics talking as they were doing their thing. All traffic remained

parked. The tow truck arrived. The massive, green, 14-wheeled, wrecker-tow truck with its stubby, heavy boom that would lift the back of the bus off the pavement, off the snow and off the Old Man.

He heard urgency in the voices of the medics as they quickly set up shop at the curb. He heard the urgency of the rescuers as they manhandled the squat hydraulic jacks and big square timbers. He heard the urgency of the crew at the rear of their tow truck as they extended the long legs of the two powerful, opposing outriggers making a wide, stable stance with steel feet set down on the street's frozen surface.

Nothing else moved except for a solitary, burly figure in bulky foul weather gear, standing there, swaying just a little, his bare hand high above his head, the index finger extended straight up like a magic baton. He used a conductor's wrist motion to slowly draw an invisible, horizontal circle in the air with the end of his extended finger. The finger continued in its circling, slowly, evenly, affirmatively. With each circle the truck winched up more cable, a little bit at a time, smoothly, inch by inch, taking up the slack.

The tow truck's powerful hydraulic pumps and motors whined their own etudes of urgency as the thick wire ropes took up tension, drawing a taut line between the end of the boom and the bus's back bumper. The truck's

winch strained. The hydraulics continued to whine but the pitch climbed as the load increased, sounding as if a big clarinet were practicing the opening bars of *Rhapsody in Blue*.

The cables inched up, creeping back over the end of the boom and down to the winch, but the bus didn't move. It was the outriggers that were moving, moving down and down. The outriggers were groping irresistibly downward through the thick snowy crust on the street, seeking a stable, unyielding purchase as the weight of the bus was removed from its wheels and transferred to the wheels and outriggers of the tow truck. The clarinet trilled incessantly.

The scene had distracted him, it was well after four o'clock, his 612 bus had long disappeared with the rest of the traffic on the makeshift detour. He looked at this watch, "Oh, oh, maybe I can grab a cab." A hopeful thought.

"Are you saying that you are going to scud off and never know how things turn out?" The voice of the distant mirror reinserted itself into his decision making. "Look over there," it pleaded. "Look!" it demanded.

Unceasingly, the medics were ministering, working and hovering, the finger was cycling mechanically and the hydraulic clarinet was shrilling and then POP, SNAP, grind, grind. The percussion section had thundered in as the outriggers' pads gouged down through the last of the sheet

ice and road sand, chiseling out a firm grip on the street's stiff, stony asphalt. The bus moved. The bus moved up. Words with sharp edges cut through the racket along the curb. Words of purpose, louder words, in short, urgent bursts. The large, cold timers were rammed into place, with the thudding, resonating notes of some oversized marimba.

The finger stopped drawing the endless circle. The burly hand came down. Both big hands now were held out at shoulder level, unmoving, vertical flat palms faced forward toward the tow operator saying, hold it steady! The clarinet solo slid off into a softer register like a cat with a soprano purr. The back of the bus dangled in the air at eye level. Gobs of snow slush slop flew away from beneath the elevated bus. More loud words.

The small cluster of rescuers hardly moved, the work was delicate, finger work. A Chopin sonata to life, for sixteen hands. Several blankets were unfurled in the wind and then joined into a wide, warm layer placed sideways across the empty stretcher. A couple of more scoops of drab, wet snow rocketed away from the work area onto the sidewalk.

"Come on, get the hard snow out of there, clear it out!" one of the medics insisted, pointing. "We don't want to bang him around on this ice. He's not in too bad shape for what he has been through. Jake and Jerry, you get on the other side. Alex!—you and Growler get underneath, Sue

and I will take this end and, ahhh, Marty, you stand by to help me and Sue when we say. Officer Deidder, will you let traffic control know that we are about to roll out? Thanks." The authority of the voice was clear and would have reassured the Old Man some, if he could hear it at all.

Again more directions. "Tom, you and Sandy, stand by to help Jerry or the guys underneath if they want it—and do what they say. Careful of the airbag splint, don't let it puncture." They worked together slowly carefully, decisively. The Old Man was moved with precision onto the blankets on the stretcher. The extended sides of the outstretched blankets were lifted up and over, folded around him like the wings of a guardian spirit. One of the rescuers leaned down, face to face with the unmoving figure, nodded 'yes, yes' and then went over, found a blue-black hat and put it under the Old Man's hand. The Old Man moved his right hand slowly and, through the blankets, held onto the hat. The stretcher restraints were snugged down over the blankets.

The foam cups, still at his feet, started to dance along the ground as the wind began to catch its breath. He leaned over and picked up his litter, the cups were still nestled but empty, dirty and useless. "Well! That is it, the Old Man is O.K. or is at least alive. Anyway, I can go now," he assured himself. The stretcher moved, a set of

hands on each of its four corners. An elevated, warm-pouch of yellow drip bags followed it along, bobbing in the air like a kid's balloon.

The stretcher was quickly and gently loaded into a bright red and white

ECNALUBMA

AMBULANCE.

Its sirens and warning horns went off in unison just as the tow truck clarinet started up again. The heavy, wood cribbing was yanked from under the dangling bus, dragged through the slop and dumped in a pile on the sidewalk. More base-note marimba music. The police started to pick up and leave, car doors thudded a slow timpani.

As the empty bus settled to earth, he wanted some more coffee but it was late. He'd get it at the club. Maybe Irish coffee this time. "The Old Man is gonna be OK and he'll get well," he projected. He liked the thought but not the counterpoint of guilt that still came with it. "Cab!!" he hollered, "CAB! Here!" He got in and slid across the hard plastic of the back seat. "The Chestnut Club, please," he said. Somehow he felt bad but he felt better, too, hmmm?

The cab twisted into traffic. He sat back. The cab was warm. A full night of key rattling was ahead of him and he could get a good day's sleep tomorrow. The Old Man will start getting well tomorrow. Tomorrow ought to be

O.K. and better. Maybe the sun won't be too bright, maybe it won't be too cold, maybe it won't be too windy.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah. Three cheers for you. Pollyanna Pete rides again," the irreverent voice of his mirrored image intruded. "What you should do is get a place closer to work, or vice versa, to avoid buses or buy a car and AVOID BUSES! Tomorrow is gonna be another bad day, a sockdologer of a bad day, just wait and see," it preached.

That was a crummy forecast and deserved an immediate rebuttal.

"Hey, wait just a minute. Everything can't be totally lousy every day. I'll go over to the hospital to see how the Old Man is doing. Yeah! I'll do it tomorrow and that will make it a good day!" He spoke assertively.

"Huh?" the driver questioned. "What'd you say mister?"

A long pause. "Oh, ah, oh nothing, nothing at all."

A short pause. "No! That is not so!"

A thoughtful pause. "What I said was, tomorrow is going to be a good, bright, cold, windy day. A wonderful day, especially if I go to the hospital!"

The cabby slowly scrunched down in his seat, screwed his hat on a bit tighter, forced his full attention straight ahead and, one-handed, deftly reset the volume on his small portable radio up just a notch, just enough more

music to keep anyone from hearing him grumble something ungracious about "Why me? God, every time, why me?!!!"

TUNNELS

by Marv Klassen-Landis

My brothers and I climbed the worn rungs
of the mow ladder; on the high plateau
beneath the rafters, we uprooted
the mosaic patterns of hay bales
laid down by the men, the interlocking,
overlapping trios of one this way,
two that way. We built instead
tangled labyrinths of tunnels,
dead ends and booby traps.

Now, when the house echoes only
imagined, expected voices
and I envision crushed steel,
cobwebbed glass or I grab
with both hands some ancient,
burning resentment or summon up
dark eyes, see myself
walking down a gravel lane,
when my mind scrambles on an edge,
drops through unbreathing space,
loops through mazes
or burrows toward abrupt,
forseen ends...

I stop, heave in air,
catch myself by the heel and pull,
begin the hurried return.
I know again the smells
of alfalfa and orchard grass,
the constriction of dark passages,
the backwards scrabbling,
the birthing out into blinking brightness.

FERTILITIES

by Stacey A. Walters

In October,
spiders
ease their bodies together
and worship
the naked sun.

There hasn't been time—
to decide if the years move backward,
and a prehistoric season has come,
vague, disguised.

Still, we bathe in transformations,
wrapped in watersacs of rain,
no more than the waiting
for primordial designs.

In October,
wolves
urge the wind to make sound
and a ceremonious sliding forth
of the nine-month earth.

Like beasts we are centered

in woven wet and the subtle stretching
of ancient threads. The dawn begins to swell,
changes, releases,
urging us to breathe.

FLIP SIDE

by Betty Bernard

My finger pushes down the drowse button
as though it could go through the alarm clock
to the floor beneath my bed,
but the flipped-over side of my pillow,
cold as a snowdrift,
forces the dawn on me.

Sliding into my jeans, I descend
into the tunnel of the day;
your cry, insistent as a buzzer,
meets me at the point of light.

I move absently—
tie a shoe lace, wash away the sleep
from my eyes, pick you up
like a bag of groceries
from the cart.

Yet there comes that minute
when I can't cross over;
I eye with trepidation that last block
waiting to be bent for
and placed with the rest.

Oil spatters in the frying pan,
cuts hot diamonds into my skin.
I don't want to shut off the fire,
or turn those pieces of chicken.

Dark comes so readily, like a hand
across my eyes.

You scramble onto my lap,
and I don't want to hold you;
we sit like two statues...

I can't bring the caring bubble up

WHITE POND

by Kevin M. Carey

With the heel of my high white sneaker,
I carve a diamond in the packed, brown dirt,
meeting the corners, shaping,
and turning the path,
back to home plate,
alone the lines of the burrowed infield.

The wall returns every pitch,
off its orb'd cement face,
driving me back,
against the warning track clapboards,
every catch,
every time,
out.

The summers lived here and in the pond,
swimming frogged legged open to another world,
beneath green slimed styrofoam blocks,
that flapped against tiny wind driven waves or
ripples from vaulted stones,
skipping.

The still soldiers of the pond,

watching from eye level above the water,
jumping and squeezing through my fingers
like the days of summer,
the hours of a hot July afternoon,
my life.

At night from the screen wall,
the insects take flight,
hovering around a light bulb
like men I'd seen around a barrel of burning trash,
flying circles, buzzing,
some scarcely moving,
motionless in the night's heavy air.

I think again of leaving,
like the fish who disappears,
after stealing a piece of bread from my line,
breaking from the surface,
down to where the dark water begins,
because I never could fish,
I only came to hold the pole,
and listen and watch,
and be here forever.



TO AN OBADYER

by Chris Farrell

I think about Obadyer

The name my chisel hearted father
would have called me

My ocean father
child of Meredith
by the forests, by the sea
and in between his family's house

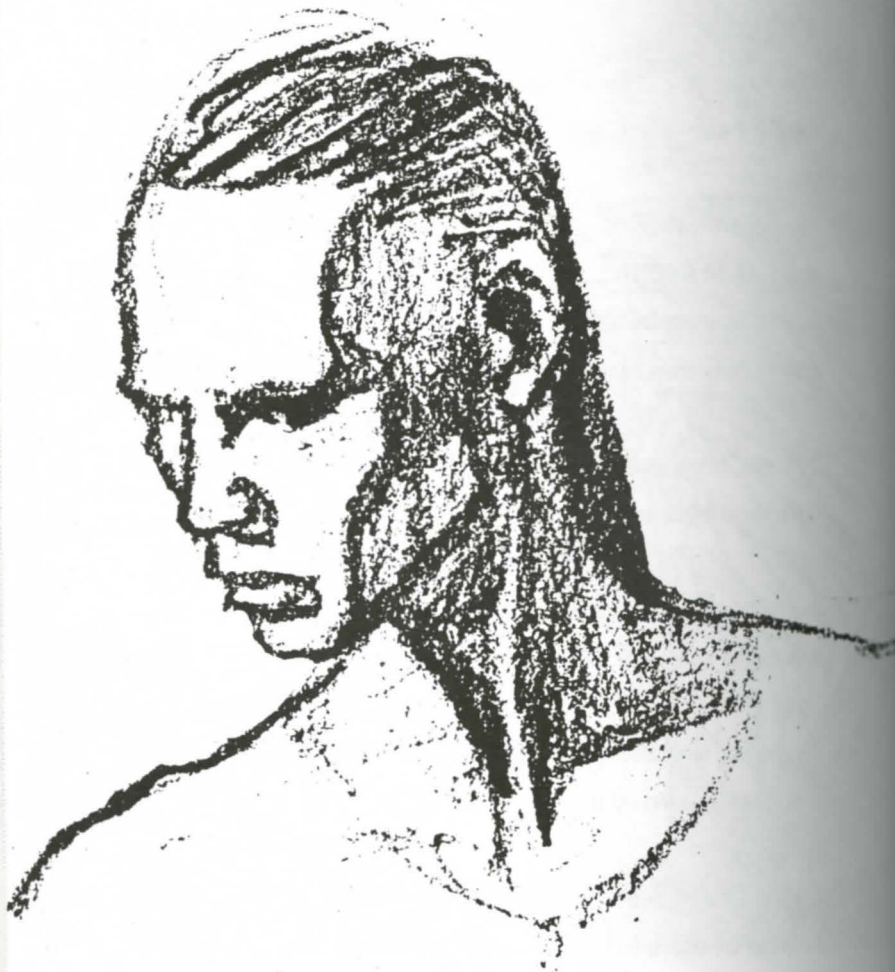
2 storys, borrowed from relatives;
borrowed because they wouldn't stay long

but father would return
to sail, to race the catamaran through

set the jib, to come about
to face the town of his

I should have been Obadyer
I would be more him
feel more of the old town
that juts from the hillside

into the Atlantic



**Editor's note: This story first appeared in the previous issue of The Lowell Pearl. However, because of typesetting errors, we are reprinting her story in this issue. On behalf of the last Editor-in-Chief, Mr. Frank Grande, we extend a sincere apology to Mary Mackie.*

Reach Out and Touch

by Mary Mackie

When it is finally night time, every muscle in her body aches, and Sharon, too early she thinks, crawls into her bed. The day, sunny and warm, had not gone well; two of her staff called in sick, three of the toddlers were teething and cried miserably throughout the day, almost half the 5:30 fathers were more than twenty minutes late, and her assistant forgot to send in the next month's milk order for the third time in as many months.

When the phone rings, long past midnight, jarring her out of an unsuspected but pleasant dream, Sharon's first thought is that it is Jack calling back for her and she sits up abruptly, heart pounding. She opens her eyes wide and comes out of that semi-aware state that surrounds and cushions dreams and she wonders if the caller will not be

Jack, but Elaine. Elaine has not made her regular cycle of calls for a while, Sharon remembers; Elaine is overdue.

In what little moonlight makes its way into the bedroom in Sharon's section of the rented house on the Common, Sharon can see her red-rimmed glasses where they rest on the night stand by her books and pictures. She hesitates, wishing that the ringing will stop and she can go back to her dreams. But by the time the shrillness pierces the night for the sixth time, she knows for certain it has to be Elaine and that the phone will ring forever unless she answers it. Her hand reaches out to grab the receiver. She knocks her glasses to the floor, where they lightly bounce along the carpet and disappear silently under the double bed.

Elaine, Sharon knew, ignored everyone not directly involved in her latest cause. Her bosom friendships blossomed overnight only to be discarded within months, when Elaine's attention was quickly and abruptly caught by something else. Sharon watched Elaine abandon first one interest, then another; she often wished she could forewarn Elaine's latest group of friends of the inevitable outcome, but Sharon lacked the drive, the nerve, the compulsion that Elaine had in abundance. Sharon had her sarcasm, some bitterness, and a dislike of Elaine that came and went, even as Elaine's causes were born, blossomed to maturity and just as quickly, died.

Elaine had taken Sharon's \$150 and a carton of cigarettes after her altercation with the Harvard police, but had refused to listen to Sharon's advice that she lie low.

"That demonstration was nothing," Elaine insisted, despite the fact that three of the demonstrators had been arrested and two others ended up in the emergency room at Nashoba Community Hospital. "They can't do anything to me without a lot of negative publicity. The media would tear them apart. The group would see to it."

Sharon remembered well the first members of that particular group, Jack's group, people she had become fond of and close to, before Elaine again barged into Sharon's life, taking over Sharon's friends, creating her own small circle. Sharon did not know how to react to them after the inevitable happened and Elaine's interest in their music and friendship went the way of the real estate career, the plan to live off the land, the life in a loft on the waterfront in the city— "All for art, of course, my life for art." All ideas Elaine tried on, modeled for a short time, then discarded when she decided the outfit really wasn't her after all, and what had consumed her was forgotten.

"I had to call you," the breathless voice says. Sharon can tell that the owner of the raspy-throated voice is on the verge of yet another crisis. She waits; she knows

better than to respond yet. Elaine blunders on without a pause for a word of welcome from Sharon.

"It's so very awful, I can't believe it." She stops briefly and Sharon hears the snap of a match, the quick-sucked inhale of the freshly-lit cigarette, one of many Elaine will chain-smoke for the length of the call.

"I'm really worried and scared," she finally whispers, pausing again, while Sharon waits.

A long time ago, after Sharon moved out of their parents' home into a sunny, secluded apartment of her own, Elaine sat at Sharon's dining room table, forking up spoonful after spoonful of chicken curry with rice, forking over her opinion on theater, the state of the Broadway-bound shows as well as the badly-produced small-town attempts, and without a pause in her monologue completely surprised Sharon by announcing, "I don't give a shit about you, actually."

Sharon sat dumbfounded and unable to respond; hindsight now tells her she should have kicked Elaine out the door and locked it behind her, severing her cleanly. But severing doesn't always work with Elaine, Sharon reminds herself, because Elaine won't let it work unless it's to her advantage. So she now waits for Elaine to continue.

"I don't know why you don't like to talk to me," Elaine says, exhaling loudly and coughing slightly without moving the phone away from her face. "You'd think I was

an ax murderer the way you treat me sometimes, Sharon, and it really isn't fair. After all, what have I ever done to you?"

There were silent, hot tears that summer morning when Jack came to Harvard to break his bad news to Sharon. He stood far away from her, his shoulders hunched as if protecting himself from something, facing the window, his long hair disheveled, staring out into the street below. At first Sharon didn't believe him; despite the heat, she felt nothing but cold. She wouldn't believe what he was saying, not really. That he would leave for anyone but Elaine. It didn't make any sense; but it made more sense than she was willing to admit.

Then, with a sudden belief came her quiet anger, and she wanted to rush over and kick him where he stood, silently now, by the window with the sun changing him into a black shadow, blinding him to her. But she could not move. It wasn't really happening. Jack was not going to walk out on her to go to the West Coast with Elaine. They talked too long about Elaine; she thought he knew what kind of manipulator Elaine was. Sharon's tears fell silently, finding their way to the tight crack of her mouth as she pressed her lips together to keep from crying aloud. She and Jack remained that way for what seemed like hours, Jack standing up by the window and Sharon down in

the rocking chair. Then Jack walked out, leaving more than he took with him, before Sharon gathered the courage to even ask why.

"Really, Sharon, things couldn't be worse," Elaine almost yells into the phone. This time she waits, pausing long enough to let her sister answer.

"Hello Elaine, it's three o'clock in the morning, not that it matters," Sharon mutters. She sits up in bed, mounding the pillows as best she can behind her, using one hand. The other grips tightly onto the phone. She does not turn the light on yet. She waits.

Elaine bursts into tears. "I don't understand people, really Sharon. It's too scary, the campaign out here, you know." Elaine lights another cigarette and exhales loudly. "It's not going well and I'm scared shit what will happen if Reagan really gets elected."

Sharon smiles slightly at Elaine's latest concern. She heard from their mother that Elaine was caught up with a group working diligently against Reagan's presidential aspirations. Sharon leans to the left in her bed and searches for the switch, deciding after all that she needs light.

It was too bright, too light, that snow-blind morning many years ago that the bus stalled half-way up

Prospect Hill on the way to school. The forty kids en route to the Elementary School screamed, not in fear that the bus would lose its precarious hold on the icy roadway, but in joy that they were so very late and would miss most of math class and maybe part of English, if they ever did get to school.

Elaine was there in the midst of the hot and restless horde, tossing books, stealing hats, yelling and laughing with abandon. Sharon sat in her corner of an overcrowded seat, trying to push the noise away, watching Elaine and watching the driver, feeling the bus wheels slip ever-so-unnoticeably backwards on the slick blanket of snow.

Then Elaine was standing on her seat, jumping up and down, beating on the ceiling with her torn green bookbag. "Let us off the bus!" she screamed, then started to chant: "Let us off the bus! Let us off the bus!" and continued while the rest of the children took up the cry.

Helplessly the bus driver watched, catching Sharon's eye in the rear-view mirror. Sharon shrugged her off, and turned to stare out the window as Elaine made her move.

"Freedom!" Elaine cried and the emergency exit slowly swung open, lights flashing and buzzers buzzing. "Sharon, come on!" And she jumped the two feet down from the bus onto the street below, steadied herself as she

slipped, then headed towards home. If she had been afraid, like Sharon, she never showed it.

It was that same determined seven-year-old calling Sharon now from across the country. Twenty years may have passed, but not much else. Sharon slides out of bed and kneels, still gripping the phone as she pats the floor beneath the bed, trying to find her glasses.

"I'm right here Elaine," she says.

"I mean, really things suck. We're busting our asses for Mondale and these assholes are too insensitive to be believed. How can they believe this shit that's being fed them by that jerk-off? Can't they see through him? Doesn't anyone worry about another world war? If he gets into power, he'll just keep feeding the war machine and damn it, are you even listening?"

Sharon puts her glasses on her head and sits cross-legged on the warm floor. She thinks about how the latest flu has decimated her staff at the day care center, what she will do about the milk order, and how her own lack of sleep will make for another rough day. She glances at the clock next to Jack's picture on the night stand and wonders just how close to morning Elaine's phone calls are going to last this time.

"Do you want comfort, sympathy, devil's advocacy, or what?" she asks.

"Oh, fuck you."

Sharon smiles as she lowers the receiver down onto her crossed leg, listening to the dial tone that clicks in within seconds after a caller hangs up.

Her living room is dark, the only light coming from behind her down the short hallway between the bedroom and kitchen. Sharon brings her cup of tea to the window, where she brushes some dust off the thin, burgundy drapes. The prism that hangs from the curtain rod was a present from Jack. She taps her finger lightly against it and listens to the rhythmic pings it makes against the glass. She sips at the bitter tea.

"Come on, Elaine," she says aloud to the empty room. "Let's get this over with so I can get a bit of sleep before morning."

Sharon remembers another far-away time, one of many that Elaine either kept her awake long after midnight, or jarred her awake with yet another major crisis. Elaine jumped on the bed, excited about Alex Grady and the dance they had just been to, the new music, the loud people, the rum secretly poured into the cokes passed out to any dancers who asked.

Elaine jumped up and down on Sharon's bed in a sloppy rhythm, ashes from her cigarette showering down on Sharon as she tried to move away from Elaine's heavy,

too-close feet. Elaine insisted that Sharon wake up and "listen to this great song. I can sing it, too." It was an Aretha Franklin number; Elaine couldn't carry a tune to save her life.

"What you got, baby I want it," she shouted into the night.

"You've got it wrong, Elaine," Sharon told her. "It's 'What you want, baby I got'."

Elaine shrugged and kept on jumping. "Same difference to me," she said.

Sharon slowly turns from the wide window in the living room and sits down in the oversized rocker that allows her an unobstructed view of the hills beyond her street. She rubs her eyes, watching the prism as its rocking rhythm slows down, and she resists an impulse to tear it down.

She yawns again. She has to open up the center by 7 a.m. If Elaine stays true to form, there will be two or more phone calls before her soul will be satisfied with her latest attempt to communicate with her older sister. Sharon's tea is cold, but she tightly grips the mug, searching for the last little bit of warmth, rocking and waiting and listening to the silence surrounding her.

The rocking chair was a present from Uncle Hank the year she turned fourteen. The oversized rocker protected Sharon from the outside, and she spent many back-and-forth hours in it, pretending no one was downstairs in the house, that she was alone and happy and secure. She read books, ate apples, and wrote long involved letters to friends in her head there. She could look out at the street from her perch in that rocking chair. There would inevitably be a Harvard police car parked at the corner, and she would be able to see Alex Grady and his crew crossing the street away from Officer Castro, heading towards the General Store to steal cigarettes and harass Millie. A look in another direction and she could see Elaine and her friends, skipping towards number 17. They would soon burst into the house, disrupting her solitude.

The noise would drift upstairs and find its way into Sharon's wrapped-up room. "Let's go find Sharon. Maybe she'll come play too," a voice would offer.

"Nah, she's probably reading. Forget it, let's go." And Sharon would hear the giggles and the slamming of the refrigerator door, and then the girls would run down the hallway to the cellar stairs, their noise slowly dissipating as they took toys and sodas and corn curls below with them. Sharon rocked on, the quiet gone.

The second time the phone rings, she is ready. She answers it in the kitchen as she sits curled on the counter, one foot in the sink.

"Jack's gone," Elaine announces, smoke and defiance in her voice. "Packed up his things and headed out to his apartment and I don't much care good riddance to bad rubbish nana used to say, and it's more than applicable here as well you know so don't even think of saying 'I told you so' cause I knew, I just didn't let on."

"What happened?" Sharon asks.

"Oh God," Elaine voice breaks. "I don't know, really I don't. Is it me? Why do I connect with nothing but total idiots?" She pauses and in the brief silence, Sharon can see Jack's face in front of her, his tall and lanky body wound tightly, ready to spring off at the first sign of trouble. As she thinks of him, she sees him playing guitar, smiling into the darkness of the cold and smoky coffee house, singing something just for her, perhaps one of the songs he wrote for her. Sharon loved the coffee house, the warmth and the smoke and the never-ending music and conversation and people she felt at home with. Jack loved the coffee house too; it was a place Elaine refused to go after she was thrown out for tap dancing on the tables and sitting on the bar.

Sharon knows Jack is a doer, not a talker. Problems never existed for him because he wouldn't confront them; in

that respect he was too much like Elaine. His and Elaine's immediate, vehement dislike of each other, Sharon expected. It was Jack's commitment to his beautiful, haunting music that first caught Sharon, and then later, Elaine. But although Jack and Elaine are alike in their refusal to confront their problems, they differ because Elaine never stays committed. Sharon has no such commitment difficulties. She tells herself she knows why Jack left for Elaine, but she really does not understand his defection.

"Idiots?" Sharon asks. "Who . . ."

"Jack couldn't deal with me, I guess," Elaine interrupts. "They never can. Men think at first that I'm wonderful and different and then suddenly they realize that wonderful and different wasn't what they wanted and then the 'change Elaine' project starts. I thought Jack was different."

"Elaine, all things considered, I don't think I'm the right person to talk to about Jack," Sharon says.

Elaine ignores her. "Hey, I'm not going to change until I'm good and goddamn ready. But he tried so hard. Little things first, so that I didn't notice really, and then it was like nothing was right, like nothing I could do was right, that I was the asshole for not living up to his expectations."

"Things haven't gone the way you've wanted since he left here, since you went to the West Coast," Sharon interjects and Elaine ignores her again.

"And that drives me right up the wall, you know? So I called him a self-righteous prick, which didn't go over well, and he yelled a bunch of vile and horrible things, the least of which was that I'm a selfish spoiled brat, and so I told him he just couldn't handle me and that what he really needed was a quiet, unresponsive cretin that would let him do whatever he wanted, and then just when I thought maybe we could talk it out, it all fell apart and he packed up and left."

Sharon shifts around uncomfortably on her counter perch. Her tea cup leaves brown-stained rings on the counter top. Her foot in the sink is wet from the faucet drips. The water is cold.

"Elaine I still don't think I'm the right person..." she tries again.

"If not you, then who?" Her voice rises. "After four years, who knows him better than you do? Who else can I possibly talk to about this? What the hell did you do to him anyway?" Elaine lights another cigarette and quickly continues before Sharon can reply. "I mean, it looks like he wasn't satisfied or happy with you, or else he wouldn't have left, right? So what did you do to him?"

"Elaine, goddamn it..."

"No, really, Sharon. I don't know what I'm going to do now. But screw him, I don't care, really I don't. These past two months have been an eternity. You couldn't possibly imagine what it's been like. Hey, none of them understand me, men don't even try as far as I can tell, and I just can't give a shit anymore." Elaine coughs.

Sharon's jaw aches and she can feel her heart pounding. She jumps down from the sink and almost falls when she notices that her foot has fallen asleep. She hops across the room, stretching the telephone cord as far as it will go as she leans in the doorway, chewing a fingernail.

"Now you just listen one minute," she begins, her voice rising.

"No, you're probably right," Elaine cuts in quickly. "What do you know? You can't help. He dumped you for me, that's life in the big city, and you don't know much about keeping things tight anyway."

Sharon's index finger is bloody where she bit the nail down to the quick. Looking at the blood, she turns from the doorway and marches across the kitchen. Her foot tingles and the annoyance shoots up her leg all the way to her hip.

"I don't need this from you tonight, Elaine," she says, her voice calmer than she feels. "Give it a rest."

She shakes slightly as she firmly but softly places the receiver down on the hook; and then she smiles as she

realizes this is a first for her, she finally is the one to cut the connection.

Quarter past four and Sharon sits in the living room. She doesn't want so much to go back to sleep now; Elaine will probably call back again, and Sharon can't stop herself thinking long enough to fall back asleep anyway. Jack and Elaine and the day care center and firing people and next month's milk all blend in together to keep her awake, and she mulls it all over, thinking about the next step.

In the darkness, she automatically puts on a Dave Brubeck album; the soothing melodies drift softly in the background and she stands once again in front of the window, watching the dark street below. She has to search through the music Jack left behind before she finds her Brubeck album. She puts Jack's Neil Young, Steely Dan, Joni Mitchell, and Warren Zevon to the side. Jack left so hurriedly; left so much behind. A few old jeans, a red bandanna he wore tied to a belt loop on his pants, some pieces of rawhide he used to make necklaces and rings; there is more stuffed carefully away in a box under the bed; there is even more than that stashed behind the storage area above the bedroom closet, but Sharon can't bring herself to get rid of it. She has gone through it all, some nights when she cannot sleep, cataloged it in her mind, and

she knows she should do something with it. She means to pack all his stuff, move it out, ship it West; but can't find the courage to start.

No cars move yet in the street below her; night shift people still have two more hours to go. The *Globe* will come soon enough and maybe then she will make some coffee. She always drinks too much coffee when she talks with Elaine, when phone conversations last for hours and it takes Elaine so long to get to the real point, and then morning comes far too soon.

There was a morning sun that burned with an unaccustomed intensity each day of the long weekend she had spent with Jack three years ago in Pensacola. They flew down, spur-of-the-moment, for a four-day weekend and borrowed a friend's condo while he was away on a training mission from the Navy base. Jack brought his guitar, Sharon her books; the days lasted forever she thought then, and she and Jack were happy. Elaine called that weekend, too, with another now-forgotten crisis, throwing just enough discord into what had started out to be a carefree vacation. "Don't get your knickers twisted," Elaine told Sharon later when Sharon tried to confront her about the disruption. "You weren't much help anyway."

Another morning, years before when Sharon and Elaine still lived at home, Sharon remembered dad

throwing Elaine out of the house for bringing that boy home to sleep with her. Sharon didn't see Elaine until that afternoon, walking down Bromfield Street, across from the cemetery.

"Some people just don't have any sense of humor, do they?" Elaine said, and waved away Sharon's concern. "Of course I was careful. I'm always careful," then she shrugged her shoulders and turned to go into the post office. "Besides, mom and dad don't matter, actually. What do I care about them or their money or their house? Big deal. I've got friends. I don't need this crap. It's okay. Really, it's okay." But she was back home three nights later, laughing on the telephone in the kitchen, her dirty dishes piled up in the sink, her laundry in a pile by the cellar door.

Sharon's own laundry lay forgotten in a heap on the floor and Jack cradled her gently in his arms while she cried the morning after the big storm. Elaine ran Sharon's car off the road that night and destroyed the entire front end after Sharon told her she couldn't borrow the car. "It doesn't matter, really, Sharon," Jack said. "No one was hurt and we can fix your car. Don't fuss about Elaine. You know what she's like; you know she's not worth it." But it was Sharon who paid for the repairs to the car.

"Another screw up," Sharon whispers as she rocks. "Goddamn you, Elaine."

Wednesday's "food section" is about bread and Sharon tidily tears a recipe for maple oatmeal bread out from page 63. The dark brown coffee smell wafts through the kitchen, which is still almost dark except for a small 60-watt light that hangs shaded over the table. The dark circles under Sharon's eyes grow deeper with the sun's approach, still almost an hour away. She sips at the half-warm coffee and thinks about all those sick and coughing toddlers who will be waiting for her.

She folds the paper and throws it carefully behind her into the basket. She leans against the wall and runs her fingers through her hair, trying to decide if it would be better to call Elaine and get the cycle of phone calls over for the night, or to wait and let Elaine calm down so she can get to the real point. She looks at herself in the mirror hanging over the sink, wondering if she has time for a shower.

The day they were invited to the party on Prospect Hill, Elaine sat at attention in front of her mirror in the tiny room she commandeered for her own, a room that had at one time been Sharon's room. Elaine sat there for more than two hours, playing with her face and trimming her bangs until Sharon stood in the doorway and pleaded with

her one last time. "Don't make a scene, Elaine," she begged. "Stay here and let me go to this party alone. Jack McAllister will be there and I want some time to talk to him alone. I don't need a little sister hanging around just this once please dear God, Elaine!!"

Elaine turned towards the doorway and a smile crept slowly across her face—a mere grin at first, it widened brightly to sunshine and then narrowed slyly to devilment. "Fat chance, sis," she said. "I need to see just what this Jack McAllister is that has you all juiced up. They never mean much to you. This one does. So I need a look-see. Don't sweat it, Shar. You'll never know I'm there."

"Let's get this show on the road," Sharon mutters as she punches in the eleven numbers that will connect her to Elaine in California. She taps her foot as she counts eight rings before Elaine picks up the phone. And Elaine has been waiting.

"How dare you hang up on me!" she shrills before Sharon can even say hello. "How goddamn rude of you! Things are going badly and I'm so hurt and all you can do is think about yourself when I need to talk to someone! I'm surprised at you, Sharon, it's so unlike you!"

"Elaine ..."

"No, really, I guess I just don't matter a good goddamn to you so just go on back to bed and forget I even called."

"Elaine..."

"Sharon, there's nothing more to say. Just remember what you've done."

After listening for a few seconds to the dial tone, Sharon chuckles and hangs up the phone again, throws the Diet Coke can into the recycle bin, and unplugs the coffee machine. She pads down the hallway and back into her bedroom, gently places her red glasses on the night stand where she can reach them first thing, and picks up the clock to reset her alarm. An extra half hour won't hurt, assuming that she'll be able to get to sleep after two cups of coffee, tea, and a Diet Coke in the middle of the night.

She gets into bed, adjusts the covers, and rolls over to face the wall when the phone rings again. She doesn't let it ring more than once before grabbing the receiver from the hook.

"You're going on longer than usual tonight, and I'm tired so can we get this over with please?" Sharon doesn't sound as short and as angry as she feels.

"Sharon?"

Sharon sits up quickly, throwing the sheets and comforter to the side. She slides her legs out of bed, staring

ahead of her into the blackness of her room, her heart thumping erratically, unable to speak.

"Sharon?" And there is a pause. "Sharon, it's Jack."

Sharon laughs low in her throat, a quiet laugh, one that isn't meant to be heard by anyone but her. Her hand goes out automatically for her glasses, and she bumps over both the clock and the picture sitting stoically side by side. The laugh turns into a cough, which catches in her throat, and she sits in the dark with her own little sharp pain.

"Jack," she says and stands up.

"Yeah, hi," he replies. There is another long pause because neither one knows just what to say next. And then they both begin together.

"I just finished talking to..."

"I wanted to get to you before..."

"What are you ..."

"I had a late gig tonight and..."

"Sorry, you go first."

"No, go ahead, you start."

So they both wait again, Sharon nervously wiping her glasses on the bedsheets, wishing she had brought another can of Diet Coke home from the center that afternoon, wanting her heart to stop pounding.

"Sharon, I just wanted you to know," Jack tries again.

"Yes?"

"Elaine and I are done. Finally." Sharon imagines Jack, in a new apartment in California, pacing around the room, holding onto his portable phone, constantly raking back his long dark hair to keep it out of his eyes, stepping through the discarded sheet music, the broken guitar strings, the empty and dirty plates and cups, the old wine bottles, the ashtray with its mixture of Marlboro butts and roach-ends, newspapers and old magazines. She can see the black leather sofa and his orange and white long-haired cat perched in the hole in the center section where Elaine had jumped into it breaking the frame a few short months before she left for California. She imagines his Gibson strapped to his back by the rainbow-colored guitar strap she shyly gave him on the first birthday they shared together; the Gibson is always close to him, closer than anyone. Sharon waits.

"You and I never talked, you know, Sharon," Jack says and she feels her throat constrict, and the tears start to poke out from the corners of her eyes. She blinks, hard, once and then twice, and swallows with difficulty.

"We weren't much for talking."

"For sure," he says. "And she remembers all the afternoons they spent silently, making love, listening to his demo tapes, trying to write lyrics for his music, reading D.H. Lawrence novels, cooking spaghetti and throwing a

few strands against the wall to test if it was done, and then making love some more. Lovely, silent afternoons. What happened? she thinks.

"Sharon, can we get together if I come back there?" Jack asks and she picks up the telephone and walks over to the window by the far side of the room. The question is too quick, the time is too late, and she doesn't know how to answer.

"I really want this, Sharon, and I think you do, too," he continues, talking faster. "Goddamn it, Sharon, I think we really should talk, after all, you know, don't you think?"

Sharon laughs. She is thinking of Elaine and her phone calls. Elaine will call again tonight, and Sharon wonders what the calls are really about. She hears Jack's voice.

"Sharon? I'm coming back East. Can we talk?"

Can we talk? Can we share this ride to Crane's Beach? Can we change this last bar and arrange the words this way instead of that so that the song makes sense? Can we stay the night together, no one will know, I want you so much, can we stay? Can we stop analyzing Elaine? Can the cigarette butt burn a hole in this stain-resistant carpet and are we going to burn up and die and go to hell for doing things we shouldn't be doing?

All the silly serious questions from their past hover overhead now while Sharon tries to think. Four years. Two months. What Sharon and Jack bonded together so slowly and carefully Elaine and Jack tore apart so casually and lightly and it is now coming home to roost. And the unanswered question that could now, even this late, possibly be answered. If she wants it answered. If she thinks it's important enough. What a trio. Jack. Elaine. Sharon.

And after what seems to be a very long time, she finally says, "Of course," and more of the past comes rushing back to her. All the good past, because that's all people usually remember from failed love affairs. With sisters, the bad can sit at the front of the brain, to be remembered and relived over and over, never to be forgiven; but with lovers, no matter how badly they've treated or been treated, with lovers it's always the good that stays in the front.

"Of course," she says again, with a lighter voice. "Will you be here soon?"

A half-hour later she rolls over, clutching the covers closer to her, smiling in a half-awake state, and she reaches to shut off the alarm by her bed. The ringing continues, and her smile disappears as she wakes

completely up and she reaches once again to the table to answer the telephone.

"Sharon hi. Now don't be all pissed, just be quiet and listen for a second, okay?" She hears Elaine drop the phone and murmur, "Oh shit," in the background. "Wait, just wait a minute, would you, this is important, so just hold on."

Hearing Elaine's urgency, Sharon smiles.

"I'm done with this," Elaine announces with a deep smoky exhale. "It's been fun but I'm really not the California type, and this place is really creepy if you're not a native or know your way around. No, and I just can't study here, there's too much outside happening for me to concentrate. I've dragged this on long enough, I'm too old for this crap, but I want this damn degree in this lifetime and I won't get it here so I'm transferring to Emerson, they have what I want there and it's close to home so those are my plans. My flight leaves LAX at 11:20 this morning and my bags are packed and I've even shipped some of my books UPS so they'll come in next week 'cause I don't want to pay extra for overnight delivery or anything. Thanks Christ Jack's over and done with, 'cause that's easier for me and there are no other ties and shit I'll be glad to get out of here. I'm so excited! Isn't this absolutely great? Don't you think?" Elaine's voice rises as her enthusiasm pours over the receiver.

Sharon laughs into the phone.

"So I'll catch the shuttle from Logan out to Littleton and Delaney said he'd pick me up but he has no place for me to crash since Shelly threw him out. He's been hanging out anywhere he can, usually in his car. Sometimes I wish mom and the old man had stayed around when they retired, it would make life easier for me." Elaine pauses again. "So I'll just stay there with you since you're near the commuter rail and you've got tons of space, right?"

Sharon stares speechlessly at the phone in her hand. So much strange news comes from the telephone, first thing tomorrow I'm getting it disconnected, she thinks.

"Sharon? You still there?"

Sharon frowns, takes a deep breath, and jumps. "You've got one hell of a nerve, Elaine! You call and harass me for over three hours and expect that I'll just listen to your shit and be nice, sweet, patient old Sharon. Well, goddamn it to hell, Elaine. Grow up! Life doesn't revolve around you. Other people have lives, too. Does that surprise you?"

Elaine doesn't answer. Sharon shrugs her shoulders and puts the receiver down on the night stand and she sits down on her bed. She sighs then laughs to herself, another quiet laugh like the one she kept from Jack.

"This is insane," she announces, and picks the phone back up.

"Elaine..."

"Oh good, Sharon, I didn't think you'd hang up again," Elaine coughs. "Delaney will drop me off there in the evening but the time depends on when my plane gets in."

Sharon scratches her head. "You really should stop smoking, Elaine."

"I'll see you tomorrow," Elaine says.

SNOWMAN COUP

by Chris Farrell

In the late Breughel day,
sun low and temps dropping

the snowman
I erected with my son
is tortured.

Its eyes thrown to birds,
nose dropped to seed.

His belly
takes the beatings
of toy shovel,
prodded with dull edge short sword.

Little Mongols in flat hats,
wild, crossing eyes, moon boots
rip into him
though beheading a king
before a revolutionary crowd.

His stout body topples-

leaves me tired.

Snow goes back to being cold,
goes back to covering brown, dead
ground.

You had the choice, Martha,

by Vivian Shipley

You had the choice, Martha,
as you clocked second month: gut, firm
flat dinner plate or inflated rubber glove.
Despite their warnings, you did not
have him sucked out, preserved in saline
to let the doctors sample fetal bone.
You lugged yourself proudly, an elastic
of Siamese skin upholstering your bodies.

Blasphemy of love you cannot now abort:
Lesch-Nyan. One in a one hundred million
but when it's yours, a statistic isn't a number
but a son. Your heart burns at whispered words
that bother him so on that irreplaceable face.
You do not love him less for the caged heart
or because he must always be lifted to the van,
have his hands tied so he will not scratch out eyes,
his teeth pulled to stop gnawing an arm. Scars
are the letters you must keep him from learning,
knowing he is taught nothing by the pain
but that it feeds need which can never be filled.

Spoon him your dreams, even though your son,

the trickster, spits them back on the kitchen tile.
Slip, slide, skate through. Lift your arms, an angel
in flight in spite of what you do that is so human:
buying the blue bicycle, propping it by the bed
in Robby's room, building a ramp that you know
he will never pump, coast or brake, flinging gravel.

ICE

by David Frank

Windows gazing north have
been pebbled by the freezing rain,
which fused molten glass
pellets to the panes...

All last night, rain
succeeded snow,
snow succeeded rain...

The man in the hooded teal
parka with somewhere to go
hacks the refractory
milkglass ice from under
his car, but rear wheels
won't give much purchase.
He'll have to take it slow,
driving a ceaseless skid;
one must be intrepid
to venture on the ice...
The undressed trees, hoary
under a crystalline
weight, bow twig-bristling,
outer limbs as if

woebegone. Something
like a thaw will begin—
has begun... the upper margins
of top storm windows
are rheumy with sparse
teardrops, limpid and pure.
The man in the hood-humping,
insulated teal
parka sedulously
chops in a grating
cadence. An embodiment
of will, he will push on
over the sun-kissed,
ice-rink wilderness
of commercial strips
and arterial streets

BLUES

by Marianne MacCuish

Not Melancholy!
that old Dame
glowering across the glove
in Durer's print,
not the down misery
blues,
slum-water black
under suicidal bridges;

Not Melancholy's witch
 string-haired
bedded in dour sheets
languishing in noontime
blankets—her answer service
gives plaintive cry—
locating her at the back end
of Hell

But... gentle blues:
the self-fleshed brush stroke
of Nostalgia;
 a pleasant pain at the heart,
a tragic actress, ripened

through gauze under the camera's lens

An Impressionist's lavender/blue

sky with the pale sorrow

of clouds splashed in for effect

A touch of purple in sea water

just behind a boat.

Her lover's sail fading as

Gwinever signals from a parapet ...

Safe from Lancelot's passion,

never to bear a child—safe

from one kind of pain or another

Jeweled in melancholy, spoiled

fair queen! Abbess of a convent,

hoarding love, hiding his letters

in her copious sleeves, sighing

over them as convent bees

make honey of her days

About the Contributors...

Hope Amico lives, studies and works in New Hampshire--nocturnally when her body doesn't beg otherwise, in which case she's been known to do so anyway. She has self-published a book: The Tennessee Waltz and Other Borrowed Dreams.

Betty Bernard is a resident of Silver Springs, MD. Her poetry has most recently appeared in *Calapooya Collage 17*, *Poetpourri*, and *The Raystown Review*. She is currently at work on the fourth draft of a novel. Look for her work appearing soon in *The Panhandler*, and *Amelia*.

Kevin M. Carey is a film maker, writer, and a long-time restaurant employee. He lives in Boxford, MA with his wife, Betty, and his two children, Kevin and Michaela. He is currently pursuing an MA in Creative Writing at Salem State College.

James B. Demsey is a new agent to the craft of writing who lives in Westford, MA. He is interested in people and their works. He likes traveling in exotic places, as well as hearing stories of and photographing the scenes of what ordinary people do. He would like to make a special thanks to Mr. Ray Harding, of Pepperell, MA for prompting the submission of his story to *The Lowell Pearl*.

Jorge deVillasante, who currently lives in Nashua, NH, was born in Mexico City and grew up in the Lowell, MA, area. He lived and studied in Germany and Austria before he completed his degree in foreign languages and political science from the University of Massachusetts in Lowell last spring. He has always been interested in music, art and poetry. He loves diversity, Jamaica, being weird, and animals.

Alan Elyshevitz is a poet and short story writer from Norristown, PA. His work has appeared in *Sou'wester*, *Anathema Review*, and *Poetpourri*, among others. A chapbook of his poetry, The Splinter in Passion's Paw is forthcoming from New Spirit Press.

Chris Farrell is from Orono, ME, and is currently in his sixth consecutive year of undergraduate study. He has been published over a dozen times in various literary magazines throughout New England. Chris finds the most joy in being a father and a good role model for his four year-old son, Anthony. Someday, Chris hopes to become a professor of English and to own a farm in Vassalboro, ME.

David Frank is a writer from Belle Harbor, NY, whose publishing credits include *One Hundred Suns*, *Daring Poetry Quarterly*, *Phase and Cycle*, *Wind*, and *Resurgens*.

William Garner is a graduate of the University of Virginia where he was awarded a BA and an MA in English. He has contributed poems to a number of publications and is currently seeking a publisher for a book of poems. He lives in Little Rock, AR, where he is involved in market research and business consulting.

Arthur Gottlieb is a retired attorney who has been writing poetry most of his adult life, though it's only been recently that he has submitted these writings for publication. His poetry has appeared in *Soundings East*, *Chiron Review*, *Green Fuse*, and many more.

Marv Klassen-Landis is the author/illustrator of *Jump, Children, Jump!*, which is a book of poems and photographs. He is a performing and teaching artist with the Vermont Council on the Arts. His poems have been published in *The Seneca Review*, and are forthcoming in *Big Scream* and *Napalm Health Spa*. He lives in Hartland, Vermont.

Lyn Lifshin has published many books including Black Apples, Upstate Madonna, Kiss the Skin Off, and Not Made of Glass. She has also edited four anthologies of women's writing from publishing companies such as Harper and Row, Beacon Press, and more recently, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. She is the subject of a documentary film, *Lyn Lifshin: Not Made of Glass*, gives lectures and readings, and has been published in many magazines such as *Ms. Magazine*, *Rolling Stone*, *Yankee*, and *The Christian Science Monitor*, to name a few. Her newest Book is The Marilyn Monroe Poems from the Lion Press. She is currently living in Virginia.

Marianne (Robertson) MacCuish was born in Lowell, MA, and graduated from Rogers Hall School in 1944. She attended Smith College and studied English literature at Trinity College, University of Toronto. Her poems have appeared in several journals, and her first book, Into Another Country, was published by Fithian Press in 1991. She currently lives in Santa Barbara, CA.

Mary Mackie is a lecturer in the English department at the University of Massachusetts in Lowell. She lives in Harvard, MA, with her two sons and five cats. Her stories, poems, and articles have been published in *Metis* and *California Quarterly*, as well as the *Sage Magazine*. Her hopes for the future include being able to sleep for more than four hours a night.

Paul A. Maher, Jr. is a student at the University of Massachusetts in Lowell. He is currently studying American studies and English. He is interested in Fine Arts, concentrating in oils and charcoal. His picture used was drawn in the Autumn of '94. He is trying to capture the moment between sadness and elation at being brought home after running away. It accompanies a short story of his titled "Twilight."

Rich Miller is a native of Billerica who is currently living in Brooklyn, NY. He studied at the Joe Kubert School of Cartoon Graphics in Dover, NJ, where he learned "how to draw comic books." He is now a production artist at D.C. Comics (owned by Warner, Bros.) in Manhattan where he designs the layout of comic book covers. He hopes in the future to be a penciler and to produce his own comic books. In his spare time, he likes to draw and give roses to unsuspecting ladies.

Anne Murphy lives in Chelmsford, MA, where she tends her family, and teaches writing courses at the University of Massachusetts in Lowell.

R.L. McGinty is a native of the Merrimack Valley currently residing in N. Andover, MA, and employed as a Zamboni driver in Haverhill. He is a graduate student in the College of Education at the University of Massachusetts in Lowell. His influences, interestingly enough, are Sam Gamgee, Arvid Ohlen, and Gary Snyder, and Plato.

Gabriel Monteleone Neruda lives in Larkspur, CA. He writes, in dignity, that he is "only a very old man studying patience. All my wars are done."

Augustine Uzor Ogbue presently resides in Boston, MA, where she is a senior in the field of Mass Communications at Emerson College. She is originally from Nigeria, West Africa. She relocated to the United States seven years ago seeking greener pastures via education. Her goal is to obtain a MA in creative writing and write.

Lee Passarella lives in Lawrenceville, GA, where he works as a technical writer. With a Ph.D. in English from the University of Pennsylvania, he serves as the Literary Editor of the *Atlanta Review*, and his poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Negative*, *Capability*, *The Sun*, *Maryland Poetry Review*, *Green Fuse*, *The MacGuffin*, and *The Literary Review*.

David Starkey is an assistant professor at Francis Marion University in Florence, SC, and is the Director of the Francis Marion Writers' Conference. His poetry is forthcoming in *Chattahoochee Review*, *Hawaii Review*, *Hollins Critic*, *Illinois Review*, *Kansas Quarterly*, *Poet Lore*, *Wormwood Review*, and others. He has published several collections of poems with small presses, the most recent of which is entitled *I Will Not Do Anything Stupid Again* (Palanquin/TDM, 1995).

Carolyn Veitenheimer, a resident of Manchester, NH, is a high school English teacher who writes fiction to explore people's needs and behaviors. She and her husband serve as board members of the Poetry Society of New Hampshire.

Stacey A. Walters was born and raised in Harrisburg, PA, where she also currently resides. She has recently graduated with an MA in English Literature from Beaver College in Philadelphia, PA. She is presently experiencing the disillusionment of trying to find a job teaching college, and we at *The Lowell Pearl* proudly announce that this is her first publication in a literary journal.

Joel Whitehead is a recent graduate with a MA in writing/literature from Rivier College. He lives in Hudson, NH, where he is seeking avenues of Ph.D. studies in English, or MFA studies in creative writing. He hopes to teach someday at the university level and plans to continue writing both poetry and fiction.

Editor's Note: Unfortunately, we did not receive any information on the talents of Tim Bevins or Vivian Shipley, but I thought it inappropriate not to name them in this section. What little information we do know is that they are both excellent writers of prose and poetry (respectfully), and that we hope they continue to write and submit their gifts to *The Lowell Pearl*. Thank you.

Acknowledgements

There are a few individuals whose names must be mentioned in regard to this issue of *The Lowell Pearl*.

First of all, a sincere "thank you" is extended to Rich McLaughlin at the computer center in North Campus of the University of Massachusetts-Lowell. His help was priceless in the initial typesetting of this issue, and his patience with the temperamental computer system was greatly appreciated when mine ran out.

A second "thank you" goes to Marian Docherty and the rest of the staff at The Minuteman Press in Dedham, MA, for all their long hours of contributing ideas for this issue's printing. The suggestions mixed with her sense of humor helped put this issue in print.

Thank you.
Christen L. Cavicchio
Editor-in-Chief

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In This Issue...

Prose by:

Carolyn Veitenheimer
Tim Bevins
James B. Demsey
Mary Mackie

Poetry by:

Anne Murphy	Vivian Shipley
Marv Klassen-Landis	Stacey A. Walters
Betty Bernard	Arthur Gottlieb
Lyn Lifshin	Lee Passarella
Austine Uzor Ogbue	R. L. McGinty
Joel Whitehead	Marianne MacGuish
William Garner	Kevin M. Carey
David Starkey	Chris Farrell
Alan Elysheritz	David Frank

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Paul A. Maher, Jr.
Rich Miller